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The Life Story
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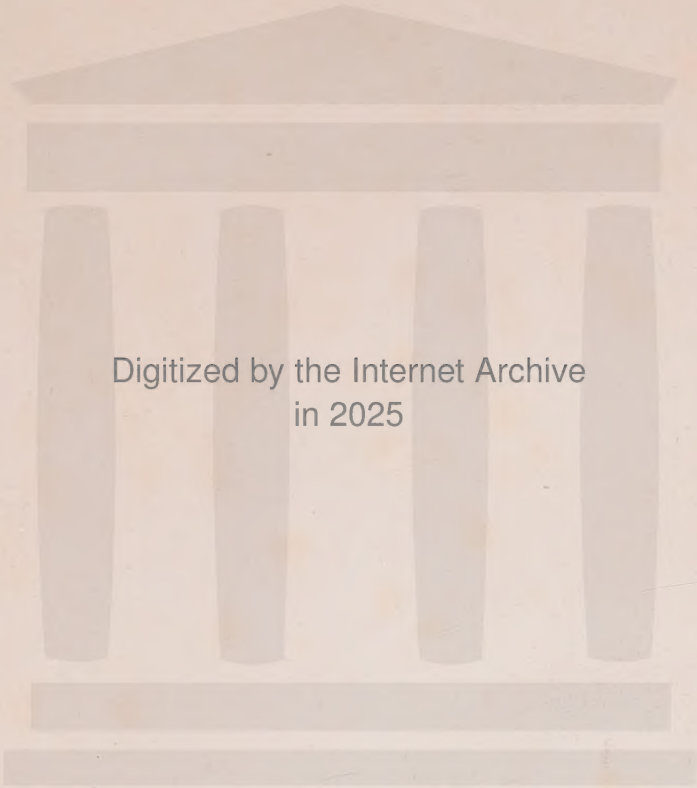
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The eminent American comedienne Marie Dr
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The Eminent American Comedienne

Marie Dressler

in

The Life Story of an Ugly Duckling

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FRAGMENT
IN SEVEN PARTS

Illustrated with many Pleasing Scenes
from former Triumphs and
from Private Life.

Now for the first time presented under the Management of

ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY
New York MCMXXIV

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Second Edition

To
My Mother

FOR THE MANAGEMENT

Book and lyrics by Marie Dressler
Scenery by Byron, etc.
Ducklings by Mark Fenderson
Costumes by Various Hands

PROGRAM

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The Life Story
of an
Ugly Duckling

THE LIFE STORY OF AN UGLY DUCKLING

By MARIE DRESSLER

I

The Ugly Duckling Takes to the Water

MY DEAR, they asked me to write my life, and, heaven help me, I said I would! Till now I never realized that the twenty-five years my name has been in electric lights cannot be condensed into one somersault!

Gosh, I've tried all sorts of plain and fancy introductions to this thing until the floor around me looks like a stage snowstorm. If the orchestra would only play an overture—if the curtain would only go up—if some one would only give me a cue for an entrance! It's the silence—and being alone for the first time in my life with a typewriter that intimidates me, though goodness knows I've been alone with lots of other things.

But now that I'm working up speed—even if I have no control—I'm going to keep going.

My intentions are to ignore the fact that something's wrong with the letter "G" which flips up its heels and refuses to go back to its place in the chorus. And that contrivance on the top—every time I poke it something jumps at me and a little bell rings! Aside from the acrobatics of this writing business, I realize I'm taking an unfair advantage of myself, because I'm going to tell the truth and shame the press agents.

How strange the truth really is! Just look at it! I never lost—or was robbed of—valuable jewels—because I never had any to lose. I never had a good, first-class, five-cent cigar named after me. I never have been shot at and I've never done any shooting.

Fate cast me to play the role of an ugly duckling with no promise of swanning. Therefore, I sat down when a mere child—fully realizing just how *utterly* "mere" I was—and figured out my life early. Most people do it, but they do it too late. At any rate, from the beginning, I have played my life as comedy rather than the tragedy many would have made of it. Some derive

enjoyment from the martyr feeling, but as an infant I would rather be laughed at than pitied. My instinct has always been to turn drawbacks into drawing cards.

It was tripping over a rug as a fat, clumsy, three-year-old that really settled my career. I discovered that people laughed when I acted awkwardly, so I began to fall deliberately, from a desire to make my friends enjoy themselves. I wanted those about me to be happy; I wanted everybody to like me, but I blamed no one except myself when I was unsuccessful. Indeed, a part of my philosophy is summed up in the story of the negro who wailed at an unsympathetic master, "You ain't got no sympathy, Boss, dat's what's de matter with you—you ain't go no sympathy. You ain't one to say 'Rub on dis,' or, 'Take some o' dat.' No, indeedy. You jes' says, 'Ef you hadn't a' done what you done, you wouldn't a' got what you got.' "

Frequently the things I got were not my fault, but I tried to make the best of them and turn them to account as well. For instance, take my

face. I realized that my beauty, if any, lay under the skin. No one ever exclaimed, "Isn't she a beautiful child!" But I found it quite as delightful when they said, "Isn't she funny?"

My discovery that my appearance wasn't in a class with the blue ribbon winners was deduced from study of the parlor plush album—a big book filled with photographs of my sister, who was five years older, and of my cousin, whom my mother was raising. Likenesses of these two girls posed in every conceivable position, with every possible background, blossomed from all the pages. In summer they stood near a latticed summer house with chains of roses and smirks of satisfaction. Winter surprised them in little fur tippets and muffs. One of these pictures depicted the two little beauties standing with the rope of a sled in their hands. Only the front sleigh runners were visible.

A visitor glancing through the book and noting the absence of my photographs paused at this masterpiece and, turning to me, said kindly, "Where is your picture, dear?" Where-

upon, I blithely retorted, "I was sitting on the sled." At the time I believed it, for it never occurred to me then, and has never since obsessed me, that I was being deliberately left out. There was some good reason, I felt, if I seemed to be overlooked.

Since I was never photographed until I could pay for the plates myself, perhaps it is just as well that the world will never know what I looked like at a tender age. Anyway, owing to this omission from the family album exhibit, I cannot show "Marie Dressler at the age of two," which may make it difficult to prove that I ever was a child. And as for my birthplace—Cobourg, Canada—I can give you only my word that I was born in a house and had a complete set of parents. Certainly no president could claim a more humble birthplace. So why should I get upstage about the grandeur that wasn't mine, even if I have been in lots of nice houses since? If there had been only one humble home in my life, I could work up some sentiment about it, but we never lingered long in one place. My

father was a musician with a most uncertain temper, and while he could gather friends as easily as a child picks wild flowers, he cast them away with the same disregarding abandon. As a result, we were no sooner established in one spot, father surrounded by all the most desirable pupils in town, than he insulted everyone within earshot. "I can't teach that brat!" he would shout, adding anything picturesque that entered his head. Whereupon, my petite mother patiently secured another letter of introduction from the rector and we moved to the next town and the next parish. Despite our chronic poverty, because of father's aptitude for slaying the goose that laid our nest eggs, mother managed to keep us in the right atmosphere, always seeing to it that father played the church organ without compensation, and by working indefatigably herself for all charities. This gave me my first insight into the fact that as long as I did things for nothing I could get into society.

Although she never acted, my mother possessed keen dramatic sense, for I remember her arrangement of living pictures as the loveliest

I have ever seen. She was invariably displaying these, or giving some other entertainment for the poor. My first appearance on the stage was as Cupid in one of these church affairs in Lindsay, Canada. How carefully mother posed me on my improvised pedestal! Her instructions to me were on no account to move! After this nothing could have induced me to breathe. Suddenly the pedestal began toppling. I strove to hold my pose, keeping my golden bow and arrow aloft, but I might have encountered an untimely end had I not been caught in the crash. This was my first stage fall. (I wonder if that was a premonition that one has to fall to win success on the stage?) At any rate, since then I have fallen on some of the hardest stages in this country and Europe. I have also fallen on a lot of soft men. In fact, backward dives are so associated with my name that every dramatist who approaches me says, "I've got a wonderful part for you, Miss Dressler. You fall down in every act."

Looking back, I realize what an active childhood I had—no plot but continuous action, play-

ing with two boy cousins and trying to keep up with their "Follow-the-Leader" stunts. When I wasn't falling off of something I was falling into brooks and ravines, the latter we called "varines." My tomboy antics kept my mother with her heart in her mouth and my father with a switch in his hand. One Sunday afternoon, dressed in my "best"—a black velveteen—I fell into a wide and muddy ditch as the result of a dare to jump across. When I was rescued by my two cousins, the look of utter disgust on their faces impressed me more than their derrick abilities. If they had laughed, all would have been well, but I knew that this time I couldn't carry off the affair as a comic situation. To get home without being seen was my only hope and I was loping in the back way when I encountered my father. Rushing into the house, I took a dive under a bed. Somehow I ripped open the bulging feather tick, allowing the pent-up goose foliage to sift all over my terror-stricken self. When my father finally dragged me forth I looked as if I had been tarred and feathered. The rail was in his hand. Ouch! And to think

Four rôles in ten minutes.

I could do a scene like that now and get paid for it!

Another time, I fell off the roof in an attempt to rescue my dog from being shot. He had bitten a neighbor's boy who had been ill-treating him and the verdict was that my four-footed chum was "a dangerous animal." As my father and the lynching neighbors came in the front door to look for the dog, I climbed out of the second story window to the sloping roof, dragging my pet. In my haste I bounced off, landing on the ground in such an abrupt manner that I was not only black and blue for weeks, but strained and sprained in every locality accessible to applications of arnica. Just the same I managed to run—or stumble along—several miles with the dog, concealing him in a deserted hut in the woods. En route I collected my two cousins for the expedition and we wove quite a romance about the affair. No one ever knew what became of the animal and it remained a deep mystery. The boys and I kept our pet hidden until we found a home for him at a sufficient distance for his safety. This indicates

that my troubles as an under-dog fancier started early.

During all my childhood I never saw a city or a large town. The small villages to which we were always moving offered little or no variety in exchanging one for another. I have forgotten the names of many of these places where we lived sometimes a few weeks, sometimes several months and occasionally a year or so. They were all quite pleasant and satisfactory so far as I was concerned, for always there were trees and fields and animals.

Then abruptly, I left all carefree deviltry behind. A sudden sense of responsibility came to me. It was the sight of my mother's back bending, bending under work and worry that goaded my thirteen-year-old child's heart into a great desire to get out into the world to help her. Fortified by this pre-Girl Scout notion, I took a job behind a counter in a dry-goods store. I must have been good, because I lasted a day and a half.

At that time the real ambition of my life was to be a chariot driver in a circus. Time and

again, I had watched the woman-guided chariot dashing in first, amid the clang of gongs and the shouts of the multitude, and as the idea of a woman beating a man always has appealed to me, I determined on my career. Of course, I did not know that it was arranged for the woman driver to win.

While visiting in a town where a small wagon show was wintering, I hung around the big black cook-wagon and the training performers, many of whom were recruited from local talent. When I confided my desire to join the circus, I was told that I might do so when I became better acquainted with horses. In consequence, I began my circus training. I was attached to the regulation pole by a rope held about my waist so that if I fell I would remain suspended in the air. It was evident immediately that I had a remarkable sense of balance. After three days I could stand with ease on the back of a galloping steed. I inherited my love of horses from my grandfather Henderson, who, besides establishing the Henderson stores in Port Hope and other Canadian towns, was a well known horse

owner and breeder. He had a string of famous race horses and also owned many ships, but left his ships to my mother, who never realized anything from them, since they were unfortunately burned at the dock during a high windstorm.

I never ride horseback now because my sympathy with the under-dog is too keen. After we have gone a few blocks, I always dismount and say to the horse: "We'll walk it together, old dear." But in those days I wanted to wear gauzy costumes and hear the crowd cheer. My family was horrified at my choice of a career and was, therefore, willing to have me select the stage where the chances of breaking my neck were less certain. As a matter of fact, I was diverted from my purpose by an advertisement in the paper.

Now the great Emma Nevada had a brother who owned a cheap dramatic stock company of his own which traveled from place to place. I started to say "from town to town," but that is inaccurate. The fool places started out to be towns and died. The local newspapers carried Nevada's advertisements for actors so I immedi-

ately wrote a long letter stating that I had played such and such parts in amateur entertainments and felt myself equipped to bolster up his company.

We arranged all details by letter and not only was I engaged, but they also took my sister to act as chaperone and play small parts. Thus, at fourteen, I started out to win not so much fame and fortune as a pair of comfort slippers for my mother.

Just before I left home my mother, heartbroken that I was leaving her so young, gave me one piece of instruction that has had a great influence on my whole life. "Now, darling," she said, "you've never had much education and you know nothing except the little things I have told you. You will have to meet people of all classes and you must equip yourself for many contacts, because from contacts come growth. I want you to promise me that every morning of your life you will purchase the best newspaper in town and at least read the headlines. If you know what is going on in the world you will never be caught napping, and, at least, you can't

help having something to say." That was the beginning of my invariable habit of reading the paper before leaving my room each morning.

The plans for my departure occasioned great excitement and neighbors rushed in to lend or give anything they could to start me off in fine feather. One of the presents was a gift of lumber which my father, with his German ingenuity, promptly made into a remarkable trunk. Gosh! I'll never forget the thing! It was a combination summer house and tool chest, and when the baggage men saw that gigantic nightmare towering above them, their range of swear words was altogether inadequate. I learned about swearing from them!

When we started out we were so proud of the trunk and its massive padlock that we carried no valises, everything we owned, except the kitchen stove, being stowed in the cavernous maw of that huge edifice. When the manager saw it he said, "What the hell is that thing," and by the time we reached our first stop we had become so sophisticated we left it behind, and Nevada had to buy trunks for us. Finding myself the leading

lady of a dramatic company of eleven people in which the manager and everybody else acted not only one, but often three rôles, I bought and proudly carried a grip everywhere. Nothing could have separated me from it, for I thought as long as I lugged it, everybody would know I was an actress.

One of my chief problems was concealing my age from my fellow troupers. It is possibly one of the few cases on record where an actress strove to give the impression of being older than she was. On account of my size, I got away with it.

The type of theatrical company which would engage a fourteen-year-old amateur for a leading lady seems to have vanished from the face of the earth. In those days there were hundreds of companies, composed of broken old professionals who had come down the ladder, and eager amateurs on the way up. Nevada's collection ran the scale from has-beens to would-bes. I remember these early associates more as types than as actual persons.

At first, the excitement of being with new

people, in new surroundings, dazed me so much that I did not have time to be homesick. I have always been able to forgive Youth its mistakes, because it does not know where it is going or why. It has no thought, no view forward; it is like a chained puppy which, suddenly acquiring freedom, rushes about sniffing here and there to find out what the world is like. It is so busy on this scent that it really takes no notice of the things it encounters. Meeting new experiences is exactly like meeting people—they do not make a lasting impression until they have been burned into the memory more than once either through cruelty or kindness. In this casual, thoughtless and hit-or-miss way, Youth discovers that some things are no good and as soon as this is realized something else is tried. Many survive these early mistakes and are perhaps better for having had them—just as the puppy who falls down the stairs once learns the lesson that he must go down them a step at a time. Others grow discouraged and cease struggling.

I consider that the greatest stumbling block to a girl in starting out is missing the sweet home

atmosphere. She begins to long for it, after the first novelty has worn off, and then her troubles begin. She meets both men and women who have learned the art, if it can be called an art, of ingratiating themselves into her confidence. Naturally all such friendly overtures are welcomed blindly, for it takes time and experience to teach that all sweetness and friendliness are not real.

From these early years of my own, I have retained few memories, because youth lives in the passing moment and I did not take time to feel my pulse or set down reactions from any given incident. Today I remember few of the names of my very early associates—but then I am always getting into embarrassing situations because I cannot remember the names of charming people I met only yesterday. I never forget a face I like, which helps some.

My first part was "Cigarette" in *Under Two Flags* and of course I thought that Madame Bernhardt, her predecessors and successors could not equal me. Even when the company stranded in Michigan, my ardor was not dampened. It

was a wonderful school and I often think if more actors and actresses had gone through it, they would take more pains to make themselves heard three rows from the footlights. From those days till now, when I come on the stage, I say, "Here are many people—some of them are like myself when I used to save and save to see a show. A lot of them are unhappy. They want to laugh and forget. It is up to me to give them a moment of blissful oblivion, and I mustn't forget the little fellow in the gallery. Those down front are cared for, but the chap beyond, who can't get into the circle, needs my best effort." Many actors make a success and get puffed up over it, forgetting everything but the first rows to whom they mumble a few lines. Then after awhile when they cease getting over, it's back to the bakery for them, and they don't know why.

Many clever players, too, have allowed their personalities to become warped by a little success and so have smothered a great talent. To succeed on the stage one must advance with the audience—go with them—get on the other side of the footlights and live the life there as well

I don't remember what this was in. Do you?

as the make-believe life back of the proscenium arch. It is so easy to fall into the make-believe world and live a make-believe life. Yet, theatrical folk are always kicking for a holiday. When they get one they often don't know what to do with it, so they go to a theater—and see other people make-believe. Contacts outside the theater are what all stage people need to make their work grow and keep it human.

I did not learn this immediately, but everything about my new life fascinated me. One of my first experiences in Nevada's company was my attempt to get even with an obnoxious hotel landlord. For protection three girls usually tried to room together, but one night I was given a single room near my pals. When I left them to retire, I found, on opening my door, that the hotel proprietor was sitting inside waiting for me. With the help of my friends we threw him out and spent the remaining nocturnal hours like children, planning dreadful schemes of retribution.

"Just for that," I said finally, in my young innocence, "we won't pay our board bill. You

follow me in the morning and I'll show you what we'll do!"

Well, my plan carried us safely to the morning train which we boarded, giggling. We were still talking over our clever ruse as we sped past deserted chicken sheds and dead cornfields. Twenty miles from our adventure, a man stalked through the train. "Is Marie Dressler here?" he asked, and like the well-trained Sunday school child I was, I spoke up, "Here!"

"You're wanted for skipping your board bill," announced the newcomer. "I'm the sheriff." That settled me and I settled up. The girls said this bad luck resulted from my failure to stick my new shoes toes-first under the bed, but I was probably destined to learn thus early in my career that two wrongs don't make a right.

Many theatrical people are so full of superstition that it is remarkable that the bird of ill omen which came to me about this time did not send me chattering home to my mother. While I sympathize with stage superstitions, I, myself, have good luck on Fridays, do not hesitate to walk under a ladder, have no qualms about a

yellow clarionet in the orchestra, and like thirteen. I was one of the biggest hits in *Higgledy-Piggledy* on the opening night after walking under a ladder at which Anna Held, Joe Weber, and everybody else balked. As for thirteen—I'd like to have thirteen yachts, thirteen Rolls-Royces and to receive thirteen grocer's eggs for a dozen. Hand 'em to me in thirteens. It's lucky!

But to fly back to the bird, I was entering the stage door one evening, when a ragged boy ventured up to me with an owl. "Say, lady," he confided, "I'll give you my owl for a ticket to your show." I was about to demur when he added, apologetically, "Its wing's hurt." Never being able to resist helping any creature or person in trouble, I sought Nevada for a ticket. The trade was effected and the owl was mine. I cured its wing and we became as inseparable as Cleopatra and her snake. Crowds gathered to see us and we were an excellent advertisement for the show.

In one of our moves (and our stands were so near together that we almost walked from town

to town), we missed the owl. The whole company was so distressed that rehearsals were dropped and everybody scurried about looking for "Solomon." We searched in barrels, on roof tops, and in cellars. Just as we had abandoned hope, a boy rushed up with the glad news: "Lady, I've found your owl!" We trooped after him in the twilight, until we reached the typical small town lawyer's office, up one flight of stairs, over the post office. Peering eagerly into the dim room, we saw a stuffed owl sitting on a shelf of books. Beside him sat my very own owl softly booming in his throaty way, "Oo-oo." Since then an owl has never symbolized wisdom to me. I thought "Solomon" acted like an old fool. I did not consider his repartee to his well preserved friend at all equal to my own.

It has always been my fortune, or misfortune, according to circumstances, to have a ready answer for anyone who teased me. While playing in Ann Arbor during this first stage experience, young, brazen and red-headed, I walked past the best hotel on my way to the theater. The phrase

"a red-headed girl and a white horse" was in vogue and some loitering students called out: "Where's the white horse?" Whereupon, I turned and snapped: "I don't see any white horse, but I do see a jackass."

That night when I went on the stage I was appalled to see my young tormentors in the front rows, reinforced with friends. Their hats were decorated with white horses and they held large cardboard horses on their knees. When I was on the stage, the white horses were turned toward me. When I went off, the horses were exhibited to the audience. This incident taught me the wisdom of looking further than one retort.

It was while I was with Nevada's company that I experienced my first love affair. Perhaps it was well that it came early so that I became more or less stabilized for further contacts with the world. At the time, I was quite dazed when the man who made so much of me ran away. I could no longer bear to stay with the company and left it, but I did not waste away—not I! I began figuring out why I had been unable to hold my admirer and what this thing was they

called attractiveness. What did I have? What didn't I have? Whereupon, I began studying people as carefully as some study a bootlegger's list, and worked out a few axioms quite as valuable as the Decalogue:

1. Never carry sore throats or corns into the lives of others.

2. A smile and kind word will gain more than a dollar.

3. Whenever an undertaking is entered upon with unselfish motives, good comes from it. The more one gives, the more one receives.

4. It is better to put oneself in the place of another than to condemn, for nobody knows what he would do under unusual circumstances.

5. Believe in God, but do not allow religion to numb the funny bone.

6. Accept kindness and believe in it without looking too closely to see what that kindness covers.

As the years passed, I added many to this modest list, for, from then on, I acquired the habit of boiling down every experience into a one or two line lesson for future use.

After my Nevada engagement, I secured a job in the chorus of the Robert Grau Opera Company at $8 per week. I longed to make good, but I was greatly handicapped in spite of a really lovely voice. I knew I belonged to the theater, but I didn't know where. I was too homely for a prima donna and too big for a soubrette. However, the fact that I was never a beauty has, in a way, been of advantage. The upkeep on my face has never been heavy and I have had no heart-aches at seeing vanish something I never possessed. I never had to park my face in a cold cream jar and I never let a beauty parlor cramp my smile. Thank God, one doesn't need to be marcelled to get a laugh! I started out with two girls who were beauties, but how they suffered for it! While they spent two hours nightly ironing out their expressions from the wear and tear of the day, I would be asleep with a dirty face. Then I'd get up in the morning, give it a good scrubbing and let it go at that! If I had worried about my looks as much as I did about my parts, my face would be used to advertise Ponce de Leon's Floridiar

springs. While I was casting about for my particular niche in the theatrical game, at this critical juncture, I saw *Mikado* and knew that "Katisha" was mine! I bought the score and learned that rôle so that, if need be, I could have sung it backward. With what ardor I used to spout:

"You hold that I am not beautiful because my face is plain. But you know nothing; you are still unenlightened. Learn, then, that it is not in the face alone that beauty is to be sought. But I have a left shoulder-blade that is a miracle of loveliness. People come miles to see it. My right elbow has a fascination that few can resist. It is on view Tuesdays and Fridays, on presentation of visiting cards. As for my circulation, it is the largest in the world. Observe this ear."

To which Ko-Ko observed: "Large."

"Large?" I roared. "Enormous! But think of its delicate mechanism. It is fraught with beauty. As for this tooth, it almost stands alone. Many have tried to draw it, but in vain."

The songs, too, seemed particularly fitted to me, as:

© by Byron

In "Lady Slavey."—Marie Dressler, Dickson, Virginia Earle and Dan Daly (in kilts).

There is beauty in the bellow of the blast,
There is grandeur in the growling of the gale,
There is eloquent out-pouring
When the lion is a-roaring
And the tiger is a-lashing of his tail!

Volcanoes have a splendour that is grim,
And earthquakes only terrify the dolts,
But to him who's scientific
There's nothing that's terrific
In the falling of a flight of thunderbolts!
Yes, in spite of all my meekness,
If I have a little weakness,
It's a passion for a flight of thunderbolts.

I hoped and prayed for a chance, but Agnes Halleck, who ordinarily played the part, was absolutely healthy and there was also an understudy, who was by no means an invalid.

Then the unexpected happened. Agnes Halleck sprained her ankle and the understudy was unprepared. It was one of those trite situations familiar in fiction, and yet almost unbelievable when it happens in a true story. While the predicament was being discussed, I rushed boldly forward with the information that I knew the part. Everybody laughed and jeered, but the

louder they laughed, the louder I shouted, "I do know it—I do!"

Finally somebody said, "The clothes will fit her, put her in."

I dashed on and threw all there was of me into that performance, and, when the final curtain came, I was acting so hard I couldn't get my arms down from over my head.

Eight years later, on that same stage where I then drew eight dollars per week, I earned $800, Fourteen years later, on the same spot, I received $1,600.

It was at this time that I encountered many sordid but human experiences. While in Chicago, during Thanksgiving week one year, I thought I would be very grand and sent all my money home, believing I could get an advance from the manager. After I had scarcely eaten for two days and had no more money, I discovered I had been unduly optimistic. In despair, I remember walking over a high bridge into a little German restaurant and telling my story. When the kind-hearted proprietor set a bowl of tomato soup in front of me, I was so

far gone I fainted into it. For many years afterward, I could not tolerate the sight of that particular brand of nourishment.

Then some girls I knew in another company invited me to go out to a garden with them. It sounded delightful. I thought there would be flowering shrubs and a tinkling pool. Instead smoke, fishy-eyed men and beer filled the place. I became utterly panic-stricken, but did not know what to do. To make matters worse there was a man across the table who kept staring at me from behind his great round spectacles. At last, when my friends were very gay, he leaned over and whispered: "When I get up, say nothing—follow me. You'd better do it or——" His manner was so threatening, I didn't know what to do. I was afraid to go and afraid to stay. He rose with a compelling Svengali glance and after a brief struggle, Trilby-like, I meekly followed.

Ordering a coupé he put me in, sat down beside me, and we drove and drove in silence. I was so frightened my teeth chattered. When we reached my door, for, to my amazed relief, that

is where we landed on what had seemed a mysterious journey, he took two five dollar gold pieces from his pocket and forced them into my hand. "Don't go to places like that again! They're not for girls like you," he said tersely and vanished. I do not know who he was or where he went. I never had a chance to thank him, but that ten dollars not only paid for the tomato soup at the German restaurant, but put me on my feet again. I didn't stay there long, however.

Our manager was anything but a kind man. Much of the time I couldn't collect my salary, and as I didn't drink beer, I could not even get the twenty-five cents per day beer allowance which they gave to all the company. Renee Rogers, a dear little consumptive friend of mine, was in an equal plight, only worse, because her shoes were gone so that her poor tiny toes stuck out in the cold.

In Wilkes-Barre, Pa., a small circus was playing near our boarding-house and some of the very rough canvas men were eating there. I don't know why I blurted out our story to them,

but I did; and they said, "Look here, kid, when we come to Scranton, we'll frighten this rube so you'll get your money and the girl her shoes. Tell your boss if he don't give you the money we'll beat him up."

Somebody mailed him a letter hinting at this gentle fact and he had his brother despatch a telegram which read, "Send Marie Dressler to Philadelphia. Want to fix her out with clothes for Atlantic City."

Well, of course, that tickled me to death and made everything all right. They gave me a ticket and fifty cents, and I left for Philadelphia as eagerly as a mouse after cheese, not realizing that there was anything queer about the fact that the train I was shipped on reached its destination at one in the morning!

Nobody met me at the station, to my naîve surprise, so I conferred with a policeman. "Go to the Continental," he advised. "That's the best hotel in town." Now it seems like unmitigated nerve, but then it was only desperation that drove me to the night clerk of that famous hostelry.

"I want a room, but I have no money and no prospects," I told him frankly. After hearing my story, incredible as it may seem, that good man sent me to a room, and when I awakened in the morning, I found an envelope under the door with two dollars in it. I never saw that night clerk again, but if he reads these lines he will know I have never forgotten him.

On the whole, hotel men have always been my friends, and I am of the opinion that a decent hostelry cannot be overestimated in its importance to a town. Indeed, it makes a town. I have always maintained that the thing which starts a town to become a city is, first, a good hotel and, second, a good theater.

Of course, the day was to come when the managers of hotels sent trays of choice viands to my room after the theater, with their compliments, but I have never had a warmer spot in my heart for anybody than that night clerk who shoved his two dollars under my door. As soon as I was dressed, I hurried uptown, where I knew my two friends, May Duryea and May Montford (now Mrs. John Golden) were with the Frank Deshon

Opera Company. Owing to my friendship with these two girls, I was taken in and given a job in the chorus at $8 per week. A kind word should be said for $8 in those days—it really was quite a decent little sum when its owner trained it right.

By this time the first glamor of being independent had sufficiently worn off so that I now frankly admitted to myself how homesick I had really been and how desperately I wanted to see my mother. Consequently, at the end of this engagement, I did not look for another, but joyfully prepared to go home.

I'll never forget that trip! More than the thrill of leaving home to become an actress, more than the thrill of the stage itself, was that first experience of going back to my mother. Speeding home on that train that was all too slow, I shook and trembled inside till it was unbearable. I thought I would never, never get there; and that once there I could never leave home again.

Most people in going home have a definite picture in mind—how the sun falls on the doorstep, in what room the folks are sitting, whether

the furniture has been changed around. There is an eagerness to see familiar sights and to become acquainted with improvements such as the desk mother bought with the soap coupons. Some of these delicious flutters were denied me, because I was going to a strange home in a strange town. But, thank God, it was always home where my mother was!

Yet after all this anticipation and burning desire to be with my own people, I was no sooner in the house than I realized I could never stay home again. There were so many wonderful things out in the world I felt that my mother should have, and I knew that I must keep reaching for them. Somehow, someway, I vowed to lay every beautiful thing she was denied at her feet. This impulse fairly made a fanatic of me. Having once been out and seen the contrast, I naturally realized more than ever what was yet ahead of me to do. I had tried my wings, but they hadn't carried me very high, and I had used my tiny savings to fly back to the nest. This love of home and recurring spells of homesickness never left me, but I soon learned that the

"Courted into Court"—In those days even *I* had a waist line.

way to ease it was to find others of whom I could take care, for if one cannot be babied oneself, the natural impulse is to baby someone else. The minute I adopt this attitude I grow peculiarly dominant. I cannot fight for myself at all and would never have amounted to a farthing, had it not been for the desire to do something for my mother. It was well this instinct came back to me, for, after my first bumps in the Nevada company, I was so careful and frightened that otherwise almost everything in me would have been smothered.

My parents were now living in Saginaw, Michigan—for they had been moving about almost as rapidly as I had. I might add that they went to Bay City, then to Findlay, Ohio. After I made my first success I was claimed as a daughter by Cobourg, Toronto, Lindsay, Saginaw, Bay City and Findlay. Indeed, quite a controversy raged until I was mixed up in my first scandal—and then they were all as eager to disclaim me as they had been to erect a traffic statue to me.

Back in Saginaw, I should have enjoyed study-

ing music under my father's marvelous method of teaching, but he seemed to think a daughter of his should play without stumbling, and after three stormy lessons discontinued my schooling. Ah, well! Shoemaker's children never wear shoes. Indeed, I have never had any lessons in anything; but perhaps this is as well, since I have had nothing to unlearn.

The only thing I credit myself with is that I have always sought the right contacts and when I've not been sure of the right thing to say, I have kept my mouth shut. I learned early that it costs nothing to listen, but sometimes it is blamed expensive to speak. What one needs is a Cain's storehouse for facts, if one wants to get on—facts which may not be useful to-day, but which may be hauled out to-morrow to advantage. Every place I went, everybody I met, every experience I had contributed something to my insatiable ambition to learn.

Facial expression and the desire to do what anybody else could do have helped me more than anything in my work. When I discovered the men around me spreading on comedy with a thin

brush, I decided to upturn the whole paint can and beat them to it. As a result, I studied everything, whether or not I expected to use it.

I will never forget the first person I saw do a back bend to pick up a handkerchief. Didn't I break every bit of furniture in my room till I could do it too! That is why falls are easy for me now. In like manner, I was never content to take anything about the theater for granted. My curiosity must have made me a pest to stage hands and property men. Why this? What made that work? But to-day there is nothing about flies and stage mechanism that I don't know. In short, lines to speak and gowns to wear are not all there is to knowing one's job on the stage.

Not having what I called beauty, I was determined to develop something else, and that something else turned out to be comedy. But how ironical life is! When the Newspaper Women's Club of New York gave their famous ball recently, I bought a table and went there with some friends to enjoy myself. Suddenly word was brought to me, "Will Rogers wants to speak

to you in the Crystal Room." I grew cold with fear, as I always do when asked to perform. Reluctantly and protesting, I left my friends and was dragged before Will.

"Look here, Marie," he said, "we've got a gold laurel wreath here for the Queen of Beauty and the darned place is so crowded with looks, we're embarrassed what to do. We've finally decided to award the beauty prize to you. Get out there and make your speech."

Thus forced, I said, "After figuring out at an early age that I never could be a beauty and must therefore become a comedienne, it seems to me most odd that at the end of thirty years as a funny woman, I should now be presented with a beauty prize!"

II

The Ugly Duckling Grows Pin Feathers

IN my early days opera stock companies recruited as they moved from spot to spot. They were choir snatchers, to tell the truth, and robbed many village churches. Indeed, good material often comes out of a choir when least expected, though perhaps I should not make that statement just before announcing that I was one of these recruits who joined the George Baker Opera Company from Saginaw, Michigan. This fact earned me the nickname of "Sag" which stuck to me for years. Perhaps it was as good as any other name, since I had given up my own of Leila Koerber for that of a German

aunt, Marie Dressler. I never quite understood why my family were willing for me to drag my poor old aunt's name upon the unsanctified stage, when they thought all the M. P. and B. V. D. Irish relatives would turn in their graves if I used my own. However, it might be plainer to me if I had ever seen my aunt.

My engagement with the George Baker Opera Company, more generally known as the Bennett Moulton Opera Company, seemed very grand indeed to me. As a matter of fact, it was a stock company playing opera repertoire at ten, twenty and thirty cents. Even at these prices Baker cleared $30,000 per year, which was a great fortune in those days, but we certainly worked for it.

We learned a new opera every week. Thus, while we were playing one, we were rehearsing a second and learning a third. I had a repertoire of forty operas, but despite the real labor which made such a feat possible, I loved those three years of constant work—the hardest in my career. When we were not rehearsing we were making or re-making our costumes. Now we no longer

know this school of practical stage craft, though many fine actors can be enumerated who came from it, among them Francis Wilson, Henry Dixey, De Wolf Hopper, Frank Daniels, Raymond Hitchcock, Charles Bigelow and many others who still rank at the head of their profession, proving that the old stock companies might be called the School of Enduring Stars.

Today a manager picks a girl because she is pretty (she might be marvelous with some training and experience) and the first thing that happens is that some darn fool stars her and has to fit the vehicle to her limitations, thus ruining both the play and the girl.

In other days—and not so long ago that one must acknowledge oneself a pal of Methuselah—it was essential to learn the stage trade before stardom was possible. The road stock company with small parts to creep in before we ran in big rôles—that was our college.

Sometimes we had one line to speak, but we were compelled to deliver that line as if the whole production depended on the way we did it. No sloppy work was acceptable. The Mos-

cow Art Players are an example of what I am talking about. Audiences rave about the illusion this company is able to create and clamor over the mosaic perfection with which each part fits into the whole pattern. That is because no one in the company is too self-important to speak a small part when such a bit falls to his lot in the repertoire. This state of harmony is what we have lost in our theater and without unanimity of purpose any enterprise engaged in by many persons is doomed to failure.

During my three years' Baker Opera Company experience, playing both winter and summer, rôles of royalty usually fell to my lot. In *Three Black Cloaks,* I played the Queen, except when the King was drunk, and then I played the King. I was the Queen in *Bohemian Girl.* When occasion arose, however, I could play almost every rôle in the repertoire, and when I played it, I was that rôle. I really believed I was the Grande Duchesse in the opera of that name. In *The Chimes of Normandy,* I was actually afraid of the old miser. In *Fra Diavolo,* I was indeed the foolish wife and I loved to play old

"Lady Cash" in the same vehicle, because it gave me my first chance to do character work. There certainly was variety in the forty operas with which I was on speaking—and singing—terms!

It was not until "Barbara" in *The Black Hussars* that I realized that almost anyone could play *Nanon, Boccacio, Olivette* and the other operas which, up to then, had been among my favorites. But the lines and especially the "business" of "Barbara" were meat, drink and custard pie to me and I went at them like a famine sufferer. This was my first opportunity really "to get" an audience and I realized then that it was portraying a type more human than a Grande Duchesse or a Queen that gets one over the footlights and into the hearts of those on the other side.

In this particular rôle, I used to knock a baseball right into the gallery, which, besides being fun, also showed me the value of letting those in front play, too. Of course the youngsters fought like tom-cats for gallery seats, so they could catch the ball to send it back to me and, believe me, I had to watch like the dickens to

get it when it came. It was thus that I acquired that desirable box office commodity, a following.

When I was not required in a part, I worked in the chorus with the same will. I was always an excellent pivot and enjoyed leading the Amazon marches. Of all the newspaper notices I have received I love best one which came to me in Minneapolis. It read something like this: "In *La Mascotte* the young girl who played "Barbara" in *The Black Hussars* tried to hide herself in the chorus, but she has a shape which would well win the golden apple." Oh, boy, that was a pippin of a notice and I lived on it for years!

I became very fond of certain cities on our route, especially Cleveland, where we played three successive summers. When I go back there now, they always call on me for a speech, and I say, "I feel I know everyone of you because your fathers and your grandfathers used to wait for me at the stage door."

Of all the routes in those days I most dreaded the New England tour, because of the cheap hotels to which our salaries consigned us. We

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"Higgledy-Piggledy"

In those days scenery was scenery and shapes were shapes.

wanted to go to boarding-houses, but the weary rounds of them met always with a door banged in our faces and a sharp, "We don't want any troupers!" Of course I little dreamed then I would return one day in my own private car—a thing I never want again either! The blooming thing is always shunted on a switch in a freight yard and all night long chugging engines, car knockers (going up and down hitting the wheels) and prize cuss hounds who are apparently employed for nothing except to swear, do their best to see that nobody near them sleeps. A private car sounds very grand, I admit, but the darned things are cold in winter and hot in summer. They are an institution relished most by those who suddenly find an oil well. After it has gushed awhile the good old drawing-room is far more desirable.

My sense of the comic developed constantly. In *The Grande Duchesse* there was a drinking song in the last act which was usually cut out because the prima donnas could not do it. Because of my facial expression, I was always able to put this across so that it registered as one of

my hits—a feat of which I was, of course, not a little proud.

One of the greatest lessons of my life I acquired about this time from Mrs. Rickets of the "Rickets Trio of England." Mrs. Rickets was a remarkable woman and a great toe dancer. When I met her she was fifty years old and her feet were so crippled she limped to the entrance before her appearance, yet the minute her music started she would go out like a whirlwind, the very embodiment of grace. How she could dance! Yet every instant was acute agony to the brave woman! My heart pounding with admiration and sympathy, I used to watch her from the wings and wait to see her partners catch her when she came off. I have never since had to do a difficult thing that the memory of that indomitable dancer has not helped me through. I have been carried to the theater on a stretcher and played more than one performance, thanks to her example of endurance. What beacons of light such characters are and what an influence they exert on the most passing acquaintance!

From the long engagement with the Baker

Opera Company, I joined Eddie Foy and Adele Farrington in Chicago in *Little Robinson Crusoe,* a Harry B. Smith musical piece. Adele Farrington was the prima donna and such a pair of limbs I have never seen unless I except Frankie Bailey's and Edith Moyer's. I have always called Eddie "the prop comedian," because he was invariably hunting funny accessories for business. Perhaps it was because of his continual trouble in locating and keeping them at hand, always getting fussed if one were missing, that unconsciously developed my own aversion to their use. At any rate, I have never used a prop of any sort. This has inconvenienced me at times, since this eccentricity excludes even a handkerchief, that delightful pièce de résistance of most actresses.

It was with Mrs. Foy that I undertook to tame a bicycle. She suggested that we learn to ride and since we were both excellent balancers we immediately acquired the trick, but once going we could not stop. Anything coming toward us invariably paralyzed us with fright. "Don't look at it—don't look at it!" I would cry

at Mrs. Foy, as I saw her eyes rolling and her hands shaking. One day she had her gaze fixed on a large wagon drawn by two huge work horses and in getting by made a wide circle and collapsed. The driver jumped out and rushed over to where she lay at the side of the road. "Are you hurt, lady?" he demanded in great concern. To his surprise and my amusement, she answered tartly, "This is a hell of a game for a lady!"

It was about this time, if I remember correctly, that I decided to afford my first clothes jag. After considerable mental disturbance and urged on by my friends, I at length decided to take $500, go into a store and make myself buy some decent clothes. I laid out on paper exactly what I was going to get and equipped with this road map, I toured the shops for a $500 run for my money. Believe me, one could get a lot for that money in those days and even now, I don't complain about the quantity of merchandise I secured, but God forgive those shop-keepers—what they did to me!

There is nothing in the world more needed than

a crusade to protect the simple and unsophisticated, who work hard for their money, from the type of sales-people who perhaps do not realize the cruelty of selling them the wrong and inappropriate goods, after bewildering them with ecstasies of admiration and flattery. Under such false friendliness, what I did buy! There were pink dresses to fight with my red hair; hats with flowers that should never have bloomed on my head; but the final outrage that I shall never forgive or forget was a tailor suit that surpassed any effect I've ever been able to achieve in my wildest comedy make-ups. This is why to this day nobody ever sees me in a tailored suit, though every spring and every fall, like the young man's fancy, my thoughts turn to a tailored suit. The vision of that first suit, however, always comes between me and the mirror. I've never admired the mannish tailored suit anyway. Let a woman be a woman, no matter how much it hurts.

From *Little Robinson Crusoe,* I went into *The Tar and the Tartar,* which was the first near first-class show I had been in. I played

the "Tartar" and fully enjoyed myself. Now I felt I was on my way to the sort of thing I wanted to do.

I was with this company when Frankie Bailey joined us from Cincinnati and it was I who put her first tights on her. Mathilde Cottrelly, also one of this company, later caused me embarrassment which will be recounted in due course. Jake Rosenthal was our advance agent, and, curiously enough, his path crossed mine throughout many years to follow.

After this experience, I was a brigand in a romantic comedy with music, called *The Robber of the Rhine,* which was put on at the Fifth Avenue Theatre. The author was Maurice Barrymore. I certainly had my troubles when I struck this company. I was not wanted and they did everything they possibly could to get rid of me. To select words carefully, they made life hell. However, I was a friend of the friend of the man who was putting up the money for the production, and they could not oust me unless they made me quit voluntarily. I never could have stood it if I had not been braced by

the thought that if I walked out my family would be dispossessed from the house in which they were living.

On the opening night I prompted everybody in the cast, because I seemed to be the only one who hadn't lost his head in the excitement, and gave the audience everything there was in me at the same time. After the performance, Richard Barker, the director, who had been meaner to me than dog poison, came back along the hall crying out, "Marie Dressler, I want to speak to you."

Sticking my head out meekly and expecting a bric bat, I said, "Yes, sir."

Then Barker showed himself a really big man. "I want to beg your pardon," he said contritely, "and to thank you for what you have done this evening. I hope I shall live to see you at the top where you belong." Despite the fact that Haydin Coffin, that most delicious English actor, and Marian Minola were with this show, it ran about five weeks and was taken off, thereby practically breaking the heart of its author, Maurice Barrymore.

Following this failure, the terrible necessity of earning money was hanging over me, for at the time I was supporting not only my mother and father and two elderly aunts, but also my sister, who had left the Nevada Opera Company to marry and who together with her clever husband subsequently suffered a run of ill luck. In consequence, I accepted a job at the old Atlantic Garden on the Bowery, where I sang two songs nightly for $10. On Sunday nights I sang at Koster and Bial's on 23rd Street, where I received $15.

What a gruelling period it was! For the first time in my life I was job hunting and nearly crazy lest my family starve to death before I could get more money to them. I boarded in Brooklyn, because it was cheaper, and when my money gave out I used to walk the entire distance there and back. The agencies were then grouped around 14th Street. I have seen Main Street, New York, jump from 14th Street to 23rd, then to 34th, then to 42nd—and soon I shall meet it at 57th, thankful it hadn't moved to Co-

lumbus Circle in the days when I had to walk from Fulton Street, Brooklyn.

The agencies themselves were not like those to-day. Then one could get in to interview the managers and examine the list of proposed productions with the privilege of taking or refusing parts. I wasn't refusing anything. There were really more chances then than now, because, instead of large syndicates, several hundred small managers were putting out one or two shows each. The men throughout the country who ran the theaters also made productions of their own and this arrangement gave more actors and more authors a chance than the present system of having a select few do everything. I am hoping to live long enough to see this system come back and I think I shall.

Before my shoes were out, but not until my feet were darned sore, like the carrier pigeon whose wings had been clipped and who walked home, I finally landed a part in a revival of *1492*. It was the rôle of the Queen, which Richard Harlow had played in the original production. Fay Templeton and Walter Jones were in this com-

pany and many other clever players. I was feeling safe and prosperous once more and quite contented with my lot, when Ed Rice came to me and said: "Muree, I got a great show for you—the hit of your life. You've got to do it."

"I'm awfully sorry, Ed, but I can't go in it!" I replied. In spite of all the inducements he held out and in spite of all his arguments I was firm. I couldn't afford to give up a sure thing for a possible flop. However, back he came in about three weeks. "Muree," he began, "I'm in an awful fix. Don't know what to do. I've got a backer by using your name in the contract and I got a theater in the same way—now if you won't go in, they'll throw me down. What you going to do? We've already been rehearsing—and just think of all those poor chorus girls who'll lose their jobs!"

That last argument finished me and I fell for the hard luck story. I have forgotten the name of the show, but there was one song in it called "Little Susianna" in which I taught the chorus to come in on my song, and this was the fore-

runner of the bowing chorus. The play was a failure, as I had fancied it would be.

From this experience I went into *Madelaine of the Magic Kiss* with Boucicault. Camille D'Arville was the star, George Boniface, the comedian, and Laura Joyce Bell played the widow. The latter gave notice and I took her part.

About this time I had the extreme gratification of being chosen to support Lillian Russell in *Princess Nicotine* at the Casino under Canary and Lederer. This meant a great deal to me in many ways. To know Lillian Russell was to love her. Hers was indeed the grand presence and she never failed to bring sunshine when she entered a room. Like Ella Wheeler Wilcox, she almost always carried a large bunch of violets, and at rehearsals she used to toss the mass of azure fragrance into my lap with some happy little remark that made my heart warm for the day.

I think she liked me as much as I did her. When she suggested that we ought to exercise, we bought some bicycles and every morning, at

10:30, I wheeled up to her house on 76th Street, from whence we peddled out, around the reservoir and thence to Judge Smith's big wooden house with its colored glass cupola. Because we went there we were often called "fast women", which amused me then and amuses me even more now. The worst we could have got would have been a glass of beer and as both of us were reducing we never took that. When we were absolutely exhausted from our efforts, we returned home to a light lunch, a bath, and to be weighed. Lillian Russell had always lost a quarter of a pound and I had always gained a pound!

Following *Princess Nicotine,* I played the part of Lillian Russell's mother in *Giroflé-Girofla.* This also was put on at the Casino. Digby Bell, Signor Perugini, Charles Campbell, and others were with this Opera Comique Organization under Canary and Lederer's management, and, of course, we all basked in Lillian Russell's sunshine.

She could give good advice as well as sunshine, and when the show was going on the road and I

Marie Dressler

"Miss Printt"—Act I.

wanted to accompany it, she asked, "What is your salary?"

"Fifty dollars," I admitted.

"You can't live on that on the road," she returned. "Tell Lederer to give you seventy-five."

"He'll give me my notice," I said.

"Nonsense. Ask him." She was firm and gave me courage, so I confronted Mr. Lederer and asked shyly:

"Mr. Lederer, can't you give me seventy-five dollars."

"I can," said he, "but I won't!"

"Well, we won't go on the road then," retorted Miss Russell, and she was adamant till my salary was raised. Sometime later I had the extreme pleasure of saying to Mr. Lederer, when he asked me if I couldn't take $300 instead of the $500 I was demanding, "I can, but I won't."

While Russell was helpful to others, she was not always clever in her own affairs. I was with her through her unfortunate romance with Perugini. I used to come into the theater late because it never took me long to put on my make-up, and passing the star's dressing-room would

stop to give her a laugh. Perugini was so effeminate that he annoyed me and I was always making fun of him. One night when I came in I said, "I just passed Perugini's door and she had on the loveliest pink robe—blue bows and everything."

"Don't, Marie," said Russell quickly, "I'm not telling anyone else, but I am going to marry him."

Well, you could have knocked me over with a pin feather!

Many have never understood this marriage; I think I do. If ever there was a woman who longed to have a home, to have someone at the head of her house, it was Lillian Russell. Immediately there were rumors of the marriage, and on the day appointed, I agreed to aid the bride-to-be by acting as a decoy for the reporters, and with them following my lead took them in an opposite direction, while Lillian and Perugini were being married quietly somewhere in Newark.

After a week I noticed a very strained situation and suddenly Lillian began to insist that

some others and myself go up to her house after the show and play poker. Perugini claimed that I was the one who ruined his life by incessant games of chance, but the games were designed by Lillian solely for an excuse so that she need not be alone with him.

Perugini insisted he was very deaf, but he always managed to hear all that was said and took everything as an affront to himself. I never sat down to a table with him that during the course of the evening he did not rise insulted and go to bed. Of course this was scarcely a pleasant atmosphere.

Soon he began growling because he was not starred with Lillian, and his temper became unbearable. Their troubles leaked out and the audiences used to applaud him and hiss her. He often made unbelievable remarks to her on the stage just too low for the audience to hear, and yet, after the theater, crowds would collect at the stage door and the fool women would cry, "Poor, poor fellow!" At this he would duck his head in pretended humility and hurry by.

When Russell came they would yell and hiss, and it was all quite dreadful.

One night while we were playing in Newark, Perugini said something so contemptible to his wife that my blood boiled. "If you say that again, I'll throw you into the bass drum," I said to him, and as soon as the act was over, I chased him to his room with a stage brace. After that he refused to go on again unless he was guarded from me and it was very funny to see him parade from dressing-room to stage protected by managers and friends.

On Saturday when I went out after the performance there was the usual crowd of hysterical women and one of them said, "Poor Mr. Perugini will be out soon." Seeing a barrel, I climbed up on it and told them the whole story. They jeered at first, then they became silent. It was my first public speech, but it certainly went over. After that there was no more trouble with the populace, but Russell and Perugini had more and more violent differences. In Philadelphia he was only prevented from throwing her from a seventh story window by the heroic interference

of a maid, and a separation was not only inevitable but necessary.

This, however, did not really hurt Russell's greatness. Once I said to her, "It must be wonderful to be famous. Everybody knows you." Whereupon, she shook her head. "La, no," she said. "You ought to try eating raw oysters in a restaurant with every eye focused upon you—it makes you feel as if the creatures were whales, your fork a derrick and your mouth Mammoth Cave."

In the meantime, A. M. Palmer saw me and offered me $150 per week for a certain number of weeks whether I played or not. We opened at the Garden Theater with Leo Ditrichstein in *The Stag Party,* which was a glorious failure—not Leo, for I still love him!

There were whispers of a wonderful English comedy, which had been brought over and Americanized by George McClellan. The play was called *Lady Slavey,* and had a wonderful cast consisting of the English comedian, Charles Danby, Dan Daly, Richard Carle, Charles Kirke, Linda De Costa, Charles Dixon, Virginia Earle

and others. The music was written and conducted by Gustave Kerker, an excellent musician and one of the best leaders I have ever known. The rôle of "Flo Honeydew" of the Music Halls, had been rehearsed by five women including Bettina Gerard, and every one of them had failed to qualify. At last, Lederer sent for me and asked if I would accept the part. Now I was getting $150 per week whether I played or not, and I was not anxious to drop it for an uncertainty, but I had heard Dan Daly was a marvelous dancer, so I said that I would accept the rôle if Daly would dance with me—an ultimatum which sent him off his noodle. He retorted he would not dance with a cow. When this was reported to me via footlight radio, I became determined to make him. To placate him, he was assured that the number would probably be dropped before the opening and so he consented to be seen with me at rehearsals. These were very cruel tests, because he was exceedingly rude and insulting to me and delighted to make remarks which brought roars of laughter from the company. One of his favorite witticisms drawled

out as we reached the wings was invariably, "Don't you think we ought to rehearse sixteen encores for this?"

Well, we opened in Washington before a packed house. I shall never forget the thrill over the celebrities we knew to be there. Among others I remember Chauncey Depew, Choate and Buffalo Bill Cody. The curtain rose, the show started, but it did not seem to be getting over. The English comedian failed to make a ripple. Virginia Earle, the soubrette, went on with the same result. Our audience seemed to be made of pure concrete. Meantime, I felt myself dying in my dressing-room. "If this doesn't get over, we're out!" I kept saying to myself between half articulate prayers. At the moment I owed two months' rent for my family and success meant a lot in my young life! Dan Daly went on and still the house was cold. I was petrified with fear, and yet I had learned that when you meet a situation you've got to try to beat it, so I took a long breath and rushed on.

I sang one chorus and there was nothing doing. In my nervousness, I hit my hat which twirled

clear around on my head. A shout of laughter went up. I tried the twirl again and to my surprise it worked. The more they laughed, the more I twirled the hat and knew that I had gone over, which is the sweetest thing in the world to an actor. This proves what I have always claimed, namely, that the biggest hits on the stage are often accidents and what you don't expect is always sure to come true.

Then came my dance with Dan Daly. I threw myself into it like a tornado. Daly was a hard worker and quick to catch a situation. In order to keep up with me, he had to dance as he had never danced before. As we started off stage, I whispered, "Jump on my hip and I'll carry you off!" He hesitated a second, then did as I told him and we went off in a whirlwind of applause. As we stood panting in the wings, listening to the deafening clap-clap of the many hands, which told us we were a hit, Daly said worriedly, "My God, what'll we do for an encore?" Sweet music, that, after his witticisms at rehearsals. "I'll show you," I said, and taking him by the collar, I dragged him back on the stage and proceeded to

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Marie Dressler Lillian Russell Perugini

I played Lillian Russell's mother in Giroflé-Girofla" at the Casino with Digby Bell, Charles Campbell, Perugini and others.

take out on him all he had made me suffer. He accepted the situation with marvelous grace and this encore was the beginning of modern cyclonic dancing.

This same fateful evening, I made life-long friends of Carle and Kirk, one of whom stood on either side of me as I sang, "Hoop de Doodle Do." "Why don't you come in on the song?" I whispered, "instead of standing there like lummoxes?"

"Do you mean it?" said they. "Everybody else who rehearsed the part, threatened to have us shot if we opened our lips."

"I give you the Hoop de Doodle Do," I said and the song went better than ever.

I had hundreds of letters and many interviews about my hat trick.

When even my negro maid, Jennie, was interviewed in an effort to solve the mystery of how it stayed on and spun, she used to look very wise and reply: "I reckon 'cause she don't care whether it does or not."

Lady Slavey lasted four years. We played it for two years at the Casino and later went all

over the country. The beautiful posters for this production were designed by an Englishman named Kirby. Later Trixie Friganza played my part in *Lady Slavey*. Indeed, she frequently followed in my parts. One day she came to me saying, "Did you see what the papers said about my copying you! Huh! I'd be a fool to copy anybody else."

By this time, I was able to listen to my parents' wish to be with me. "Your father and I sit alone at night," my mother would write, "with our babies gone. I wish we could see you occasionally! If we could only live in New York." Whereupon, I said to myself: "They must get here. How can I get the money? Maybe I can steal it! It must come!" *Lady Slavey* made this possible and I established a home in Long Island City for my people, where they remained about four years. Every night after the performance, I used to take the ferry home and I still remember those ferrymen as the finest fellows who ever breathed. While it was much safer traveling about late in those days than it is

now, those men used to watch for and protect me.

Subsequently, I had an apartment at 1566 Broadway, where the Palace Theatre now stands. From there I moved to the Metropole and brought my parents with me, but mother liked Long Island and I made another home at Bayside. This Bayside experience taught me one of the biggest lessons of my life—that nothing is too hard or too difficult to do if it makes someone else happy. For three years I commuted to New York, taking the last train home and walking a mile and a half on a dark country road, but it was worth it to receive my mother's welcome. She always sat up and waited for me, asking what stories the trainmen had told me that night. They all knew me and were as good and kind as my protectors, the ferrymen.

Following my first season in *Lady Slavey,* my mother said to me, "Dear, you have worked long and hard. You must have a vacation."

With much consultation of maps, hotel guides and fashion plates, it was finally decided I was to go to the Marion House on Lake George. My, what a to-do there was about getting my frocks

ready! My mother fondly believed the whole resort would turn out and cast itself in front of me as a carpet, but in those days an actress was an actress and if she chanced to play doubtful parts she was still more of an actress. I had no sooner reached the place than the rumor spread that the terrible woman who played "Flo Honeydew" in *Lady Slavey* had arrived. As a result, fond mammas tied their sons to the bed posts, locked up their daughters, and instructed the dogs not to wag their tails. If one so much as approached me, there were wild cries of, "Here, Yip, you, Yip, come back here!" Heads were carefully turned whenever I appeared and I earnestly wished my three weeks were up, for my exclusion was perfect. The chief amusement of the day was going down to the docks to see the boats come in, and, although public opinion never allowed me out on the pier with the crowd, I always went near enough to survey the picture. After one of these excursions, I returned to the hotel feeling extremely lonely and blue. Back of the hotel was a cheap dance hall with a tinpanny little old piano. As it has always been

my custom to seek a piano when I am unhappy, I went into the damp, cold room. Evergreens from an old party were drying on the wall. Bits of torn bunting and cigarette and cigar stubs lay around, but I touched the abused keys of the little piano and began singing. Finally I heard someone at the window.

"Very, very charming," murmured an old voice. "Do you perchance sing, 'Believe Me, If All Those Endearing Young Charms.' "

"Certainly," I said. "Won't you come in and sit down?"

"I've just walked down from the cottage above here," vouchsafed the newcomer. "Yes, I will come in, if I may."

She entered, took a seat near me, and sat for a long time while I sang to her. When I had finished, she asked if I would not return to the cottage with her, and, much agitated at such kindness, I accompanied her, wondering whether or not I should tell her who I was. At last, however, I decided it would be more fair to admit my identity and was surprised to find that it did not debar me from being introduced to her daughter.

When I went back to the hotel, I dressed for dinner, regretful that my perfect moments were over. Imagine my surprise on entering the dining-room to find people rising all about me!

"Won't you sit here?" said one, and, "You'll find a better view over here," said another, and, "We've been saving a place for you here," insisted a third. I was extremely dazed until I found out that the little old lady who had been so kind to me was Mrs. U. S. Grant! Later—by a coincidence she went to Canada and bought a home in Cobourg, my birthplace. I have watched all her grandchildren grow up and marry, with a prayer on my lips for their happiness.

While still on the road in *Lady Slavey,* I was taken very ill in Denver and was brought back to New York in a private car. Erlanger, who had then gone in with Lederer, would not believe I was ill and when I was kept off Broadway for several years, I naturally believed the rumors current that credited him with out-Czaring the Czar. Indeed, it was said that the Romanoffs at their palmiest never equalled Erlanger's power

My favorite cartoon.

on Broadway. I always felt that it was the misuse of power by some of these old-time managers which helped Sam Shubert to enter the field and find his footing. This was made possible, according to gossip, by the fact that if a chorus girl left a company to better herself or in any other way displeased the managers, it was their custom to blue pencil her name. It was reported that they always asked for the cast lists of every show and if anyone dared oppose them by the stubborn retention of a tabooed name, there were no bookings for the show.

This abuse of power increased until it appeared to threaten the security of principals as well as the chorus. It was about this time that Shubert began to make his own productions, and his fair treatment of his people rapidly attracted many prominent actors to him. Certainly the loyalty of the theatrical people has contributed to the Shuberts' success.

One of my happiest memories of *Lady Slavey* is my maid, Jennie. Previously I had been unable to afford such a luxury, but I knew that I must have assistance before opening in Wash-

ington. I spoke, therefore, to a girl I saw in the theater and she said, "I have a friend who lives in Washington who would wait on you the week you are in the capital."

Thus, Jennie came to me, and staid for fourteen years, until she died, and I took her body back to be laid by her people. She worshiped me, loved my successes, and looked out for me in every possible way, even carrying what little money I had and doling it out to me as the occasion demanded.

"I suppose I ought to have a coat," I would say.

"Yes, Missie, you ought," was her retort, "but get you a good one, darling. Just remember nothing's cheap that's cheap."

"But I can't afford a good coat," I would demur.

" 'Deed you can, honey," she would declare, "I been saving out on you. I got forty dollars saved up you don't know nothin' about."

For the last two years of Jennie's life, I carried some one to wait on her, but she never knew it. Everybody respected her and loved her.

She was engaged to a man in Washington and gave him up to wait on me. Her wit caused great merriment to all my friends.

On one occasion when we were waiting in a little town, a young fellow in the company said to Jennie, "Better come on in here, Jennie. We'll give you a drink of gin."

She did not reply, so the young man persisted. "Surely you coons like gin."

Still she did not answer, and the young fellow, slightly embarrassed, said, "You'll excuse me, won't you?"

Whereupon, she replied quickly, "Yes, sah, you have a standing excuse with me."

Despite my prosperity in *Lady Slavey,* I had been able to save nothing so when my engagement was ended by illness I was broke again—which always cures me.

III

The Ugly Duckling Loses Some Feathers

AFTER working for four years like the thrifty ant, here I was at the end of my first big success in *Lady Slavey* as hard up as the grasshopper. During my subsequent career, I made several fortunes—and have been broke just as often. Where did my money go? I can only answer that I never squandered it on myself. My wants have always been simple. I make my own clothes and if my life permitted, I would cook my own food—that's the sort of domestic person I am at heart and by every inborn instinct. Moreover, I have always had so many dependent on me that I never acquired the habit of personal

extravagance. Even when money has come in tons, I never felt that I could walk into a store and say, "I'm going to have this or that" just because I fancied it. I admit I am naturally lazy and love luxury—I'd like to loll back in a "vermin" wrap the rest of my days, but I never have and never will allow these things to dominate me.

To go back and tackle the plot—I had arrived on the rung of the ladder where managers were sending for me and this time I didn't have to go around looking for a job—a dreadful ordeal, but it is impossible to go very far in this business without it.

My next summons was for *Courted into Court* produced by William H. Harris. Sallie Cohan and John C. Rice were in the show and I played the rôle created by May Irwin. This piece was written by Johnny McNally of *The Boston Herald.* We pushed the play to San Francisco and back. George Hobart's farce called *Miss Print* was my following vehicle and was also played on the road.

I finally achieved my own kind of a part in

New York in Sydney Rosenfeld's screamingly funny burlesque, *The King's Carnival,* at the New York Theater the season of 1901-'02, under the Sire Brothers' management. They were an odd combination. Any woman could go to them with a hard luck story and get $200, yet it would take her two months to collect $50 if they owed it to her. Their chief claim to fame is that they did know how to select good companies. In *The King's Carnival* were Louis Harrison, Emma Carus, Dan McAvoy, Amelia Summerville, Frank Doane, Junie McCree, Edith Moyer, Laura Burt, Maybelle Gilman and others. The show proved that there was more poetry than truth in the popular adage, "Sired by the Sires and damned by the public."

In such a distinguished cast, I was especially proud to have the critics commend my bit as the "Queen of Spain," rocking the Infanta who was played by Amelia Summerville in a huge crib. It was with this show that I sang one of my best songs, "Ragtime Will Be My Finish," by George Hobart. Many have never forgotten the production on account of a fall which I forced Louis

Harrison and Dan McAvoy to make with me. I suggested that we dance backward to three throne chairs, sit in them, and then disappear, heels over head. Both men objected. "All right, I'll fall," I said, and of course they would not let me get away with this alone, so they had to fall, too. Not knowing the technique of stage falls they hurt themselves every night and only the roars of laughter we evoked kept them at the task.

Another engagement I thoroughly reveled in at the New York Theater was with Sam Bernard in *The Hall of Fame,* one scene of which was laid on the Madison Square Roof Garden, then in its vogue. Bernard was, I think, the funniest comedian I ever worked with unless I except Harry Watson. Bernard's stuff, or much of it, was impromptu and was so unctuous that it was side splitting. The roof scene, as originally written, contained three lines for Bernard, two for a waiter and two for me. Designed for a two minute act, it soon stretched to twenty. We never knew where it would come from nor where it would go, but people used to rock in their

chairs and we enjoyed it as much as they did. This part of the entertainment was about 9:45 and up to that time there would be rows of empty seats, bought by clubmen, who would come every night for this feature. By the way, what's become of the "typical New York Club man?" Has this butterfly caterpillared back into, "The Tired Business Man?"

It was with Bernard that I had the fun of performing in a burlesque of Romeo and Juliet. Bernard played Juliet in a haymow and looked very handsome indeed. I played Romeo, which was the second time I had worn tights. One night Bernard brought in the huge bottle of poison—a sticky, evil looking liquid—which I immediately concluded was shellac. He set it down too hard and I heard the glass crack. A stream of the alleged "pizen" started toward me and I knew if I did not get out of its way my clothes were ruined. I rolled and it ran and we kept trying to outdo one another until I went right over into the audience. Sydney Rosenfeld wrote all these burlesques and they were exceedingly funny.

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"Higgledy-Piggledy"
"The Squaw Man's Girl of the Golden West."

When Weber and Fields quarreled and went their separate ways, I joined Joe Weber's company in *Higgledy-Piggledy* which was called "a Rigmarole of Fun, Fancy and Foolishness, in One Exhibit." It is interesting to note that our small company, which had only about half a dozen names to conjure with, played at the Weber and Fields' Music Hall and on the road to the same number as that famous Weber and Fields' organization which included twenty stars such as Pete Daly, Lillian Russell, John T. Kelly, Fay Templeton, William Collier, Louise Allen, David Warfield, Charles A. Bigelow, Mabel Barrison, Sam Bernard and Frankie Bailey. In our company were Audrey Boucicault, Charlie Bigelow, Harry Morris, Trixie Friganza, Weber, Amy D'Angelis, Bonnie Magin of the twinkling toes, and myself. Weber played the millionaire pickle king, Adolph Schnitz, and I was his daughter, Philopena Schnitz, heiress to the pickle millions and I wore a tremendous diamond pickle on my breast to prove it. The dialogue and lyrics were by Edgar Smith and the music was by Maurice Levi.

The burlesques we played, such as *The College Widower* and *The Squaw Man's Girl of the Golden West,* have become classic memories. It is seldom that their equal is ever seen now. Poor Harry Morris, the great burlesque actor, made his first appearance out of burlesque with us and for some reason did not get over and soon after his failure, died. His wife was May Howard of the famous "May Howard's Burlesquers!"

When I joined the Weber Company, Anna Held was with it, but I worked so hard that the papers began to refer to me as "the star obscurer." Anna Held was a good sport, however, and hung on for several weeks, but finally she came to me and taking my hand said, "I'm leaving, dear, but I have no hard feelings. Do you know what I did? I told Flo Ziegfield if he didn't put you under contract for ten years he would make the mistake of his life." I always loved Anna Held—she was a very fine woman.

Later, I played with both Weber and Fields in their reunion and revival at the 44th Street Theater, but I never enjoyed this engagement as I did my work with Weber alone. Fields

and I, unfortunately, never got along very well together. Matters grew worse until finally he would not play with me at all. This was most unjust, for I believed then, as I do now, that good teamwork is essential, not only to the success of the play but to the individual as well. I created much funny business that a wiser man would have sought with avidity. The amusing Frank Daniels was with this organization, although he, also, did not seem to be entirely happy.

One of this comedian's pet tricks was to stand in the center of the stage—in fact, he could not play unless he did. To even up, I used to get in my work when he wasn't looking, and sometimes I left the audience in such a gale that he never knew what it was all about.

In this production, I remember I wore a fur coat made of a rug with a vicious looking head hanging over my shoulder and the animal going round and round my body, the tail hanging loose. One night I whispered to Fields to play with the head and when he did he got a roar. "Brute of a thing," he screamed. "Let it run around."

"It's got all it can do to run around me," I came back, and of course the laugh I got made him so mad that the scene was cut out. But that same evening, Weber began playing with the head and Fields told him to drop it. Whereupon, I said kindly: "Here, darling," giving it back to Weber, who looked so helpless, that that drew another laugh. While Weber and Fields began an altercation, I piped up, "I'll speak to my lawyer, that's what I'll do," and I went and talked to a lamp on a newel post. Of course no one heard either of them then.

I was finally fired from this company. We were rehearsing a new act. Every time rehearsal was called they cut one of my scenes. About that time Charles Darnton, the critic, came in. "Howdy do, howdy do," he greeted me, "how are you doing?"

"All right," I said and began to laugh. "I guess I'll be cut out in two weeks."

When Darnton wrote the interview he made the statement that Dressler was leaving the theater in two weeks. At that Fields came to

me banging the paper in a rage, "Did you say this?" he bellowed.

"Let's not talk now," I said. "You are excited."

"You'll get out of my theater," he screamed.

"All right," I retorted. "It's your theater." And I got out. It was his theater and I didn't want the old barn anyway. And I made a good exit while I was about it.

Despite the fact that I am a comedy actress, I have a certain dignity that is sacred to me and that I will not allow abused.

Another time I was fired was when a certain star put me out of a company in Pittsburgh. Nevertheless, I went on to Philadelphia with the company. The conductor came in.

"Where's your ticket?" said he.

"I'm with the show," I said.

"They say you aren't," he returned.

Well, the girls took up a collection to get me there, and I walked into the Hotel Walton where Mr. Swett, who later opened the Traymore at Atlantic City, was manager.

Swett came over to me. "What are you doing here, Miss Dressler?" he said.

"I have no right here," I admitted. "They fired me."

"What did you do?"

"I don't know."

"Did you get full?"

"No—you know perfectly well I never do."

"Did you always 'tend rehearsal?"

"I'm always there ten minutes ahead of time."

At that he called a lawyer from a nearby table and the upshot was that they looked into the matter and found that the company would have to pay me as long as the show ran. Consequently, they thought it cheaper to take me back. We opened in the Bijou in New York and I achieved personal success, but they made it so hot for me that I eventually decided that peace of mind was the better part of valor, and left.

Never having saved the programs of the plays in which I appeared and never having been a slave to the scrap book or diary habit, I am relying solely on my memory for the sequence of events. In consequence, those of my readers

who are clipping hoarders may find spots where the horse follows the cart or where I have even left off his ears. In such cases, I can only repeat that it is impossible to condense a life into a few pages without making mistakes, unless one has planned from infancy to autobiographagate so that the sticklers must content themselves with crowing, "Ha- ha! Here's where Marie falls down again."

As nearly as I can recall, I next opened in *Hotel Topsy Turvy* which was followed by one of those three thousand and thirty-second revivals of *The Rivals,* noteworthy in this case because the all-star cast was headed by Willie Collier.

It was about this time, too, that I made my venture into vaudeville. I was not only the first star who did so, but I was also the first star who went into moving pictures. I never was afraid to make experiments or take new steps. Indeed, I have never been set in my ways and because I have made one plan I never hesitate to change it because a better one turns up. Everybody told me that when I once went into vaudeville I would never play Broadway again, which seemed to be

ridiculous, since the stage doors of the legitimate and vaudeville houses look alike and the audiences don't look much different.

I have always had an excellent sense of the theater and have picked many players, as well as shows, for winners before their worth has been generally appreciated. It was I, for instance, who first insisted that Erlanger go to see the Rogers Brothers when they were playing on Koster and Bial's roof. I had thought them darned funny and wanted somebody to get them. At my insistence Erlanger put them under contract and they made a great deal of money for him. One of the boys later married Maude Raymond, Sam Bernard's sister.

I was always rushing to Percy Williams with my discoveries. One of them was Walter Kelly (the Virginia Judge) whom I had met at a beefsteak dinner. He said he'd like to go on the stage and at the time I was working for Percy. We were just putting on a sketch called, "Sweet Kitty Swellairs." The opening night I was taken very ill and flopped in the first act and Kelly, who had been given a part, had to go

Sam Bernard as *Juliet* and Marie Dressler as *Romeo* in a burlesque on the *New York Roof*.

on and fill in with his stories. That was the beginning of his monologue and he has been a top liner ever since.

I admit that, led away by my sympathies, I'd handed Percy a few lemons, and he was losing faith in my protegés when along came Melville Ellis. He was stopping at the Holland House, running up a bill and nothing in sight. So I called up Percy. "I've got another one for you!" I announced.

"You behave!" said he, and wouldn't consent to give him a chance.

"Honest," I pleaded, "if you need anybody for Sunday night, put him on."

"All right—*if* I need him!"

Sunday the phone rang. "Where's that protegé you have?" demanded Percy. "Guess we'll be able to use him tonight."

Melville Ellis made a big hit and restored me to Percy Williams' confidence as a good picker. When I opened in *Tillie's Nightmare,* Ellis sent me my bridal bouquet of real flowers—lilies-of-the-valley—and a message, "To the woman who made me—the best friend I ever had."

What a horde of memories enrich me! It is interesting to contemplate the thousands and thousands of lines alone which I have memorized. Comedy, tragedy, musical pieces, movies, vaudeville—everything from the most modern vehicle the author of the moment could invent to the classics such as *The Rivals.*

One of my triumphs following *The Rivals* was playing ten weeks straight at Proctor's 58th Street Theater, a feat which was then unknown. While at this house a man came into my dressing-room bringing a skit. He was accompanied by a little old figure who stood in the background. Unfortunately I took a dislike to the young man and tried to get him out. My decision was accepted passively, but as they started to go, the little old man held out his hand. "Good-bye, Miss Dressler," he said, "this is a great disappointment." There was something so pathetic about the bent figure that my heart melted and I said impulsively, "Here, come back. I'll read the thing." I not only read it, but put it on for the sake of that little old man, with the result that it was a great hit as *Tess of the Vaudevilles.*

This was about the period of Mrs. Fiske's phenomenal run in *Tess of the D'Uzrbervilles* and was timely and appreciatively welcomed. Alan Dale came twice to see it and gave me one of the finest notices I have ever received. Among other things he said he had never seen such a perfect piece of burlesque as my interpretation of the famous Fiske personality. Yet at that time I had never seen Mrs. Fiske on the stage. I have since and thank God for her!

It was at Proctor's, indeed, that I started my acquaintance with Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish. I was carrying a basket of leeks in a burlesque of the Cherry Sisters, when the impulse struck me to begin throwing them. Whereupon, I hit Mrs. Fish on the head with one which greatly entertained both her and her guests.

Afterwards we became friends. I always admired her first for her brains and then because under her somewhat gruff exterior there was a protective instinct. She always tried to hide her soft spot, but it was there. Early in our acquaintance, she sent for me to entertain one of her parties and asked what I would charge. I

was making good money then and told her I wouldn't charge anything. "Very well," said she decisively, "you may come to my party, but I won't let you appear."

Another time when I refused to render a bill, she met me at the door as I was leaving. "I hope you've had a good time," she said. "Here's a souvenir of the occasion." The souvenir proved to be a gold pocket book filled with gold. Whereupon, mother got the bonnet she wanted and my father the heavy coat.

Another time this American aristocrat gave me a jeweled bracelet. "Here," said she, suddenly taking the priceless ornament from her arm, "I don't want this thing any more. You wear it." And I did! Indeed, I didn't wear gloves for a month!

I shall never forget one wonderful function at Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish's beautiful home. I was a trifle late in arriving and as I hurried in, I met Mrs. James Speyer at the door. As I took her arm, I murmured, "I never use a prop on the stage, but I need one in society." Somebody said, "Sh," as the entertainment part of the pro-

gram had begun. At that we absolutely slid into the ballroom and landed tailor fashion on the floor at the feet of Mrs. Reginald de Koven.

Those were the wonderful days when everybody drove in Central Park in hansoms or other horse-drawn equipages simply to bow to friends. Imagine bowing to a friend there now from the depths of a motor!

I used to have a bowing acquaintance with every squirrel and tree in the Park. Now I'm out at 110th St. before I'm in at 59th. Driving is a pleasant custom which is much missed, and was so typical of a picturesque, leisurely day that is gone, but of course new days bring changing ways and those of us who have any breath left in us keep up with them, as is evidenced by what occurred to me one evening when returning from an out-of-town charity benefit. When we reached the city I assured my escorting party that it was unnecessary for them to make the trip to the hotel so late and that I was perfectly safe. As they had a long way to go they finally agreed to leave me to the tender mercies of a

taxi-driver, but first one of the gentlemen sought to impress him.

"You must take fine care of this lady," said he, "it is Miss Marie Dressler."

"Huh," said the taxi-driver, "I've been taking care of her longer than you have. You aren't telling me nothin'. I used to drive her hansom from Weber and Fields' to her place every night."

Not only does New York miss the victorias and hansoms, but unfortunately the time of the colorful four-in-hands seems to have vanished too, whether from lack of time, lack of money or the speed craze who can say. There are still many, however, who find a thrill at the mention of famous whips like Alfred Vanderbilt, "Fatty" Bates, and James Hazen Hyde. I was particularly proud of my friendship with Bessie Stokes, afterward Mrs. Jules Vatable and now Madam Terrien, for she was a most excellent whip and brought exclamations of surprise to onlookers as she dexterously controlled the beautiful animals she loved.

I shall never forget my first coaching experi-

ence in Newport. Three of my old beaux—in spite of that now happy and well married—took me on an excursion to Narragansett Pier. I was on the front seat of the coach when the heavens opened up for the worst storm I have ever seen. The thunder and lightning were so terrible that the men suggested I go inside, but I would have none of it. "Let her come," I insisted. "Let me die with the Four Hundred!"

But Newport had not seen the last of me on that trip. I drank its Oolong on more than one visit and it was nothing for me to receive cordial bows from $300,000,000 in an hour. Yes, indeed! Of course some of these bows were a tribute to Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish's machine I was in, which counted some.

I've never been able to understand why people made so much fuss about clothes in Newport. There were only four hundred people to look at a million dollars' worth of costumes and on account of the weather they couldn't wear but one costume at a time. So anybody could see they never got their money's worth. It's no concern of mine, of course. I mention it because at home

we have all sorts of trouble with moths. The pests!

Even though my gowns weren't as expensive as some of the other folks, I seemed to mingle freely with heiresses, corporation directors and gentlemen.

Society used to enjoy the surf at Newport, I'll say that. Sometimes I saw as many as thirty persons go down to Mr. Bailey's fashionable beach, put on their bathing suits and just fuss around. The high tide at Bailey's, by the way, didn't seem to know the overhand stroke—it ran almost exclusively to undertow. Nobody but trained tumblers could enjoy it and as a result the bathers bathed on a well-kept lawn behind the bath houses.

There was always something very friendly about Newport. An automobile would whiz by me and somebody would sing out "Bonjour" and I'd call back "Bon Ami" or "Hoi Poiloi" and so it would go. Yes, in the old days it was real fun even if the green corn was the price of emeralds and a sliver of lemon in the tea cost

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"The College Widower"
Can you find a better-looking chorus than this — or better-fed?

as much as if there had been an amendment against its use.

I had many dear and expensive friends there, living behind cosy stone walls that presented the pleasing panorama seen on the Poughkeepsie local as it passes Sing Sing. Scenically, Newport to me is just a few miles of ordinary foliage —some chestnut and some birch. One motored a meter or so and came to a tree. That was passed. Then one motored another meter and came to a knob like a bunker in Van Courtland Park; then on a little farther and one would see a flower. Of course if one got tired of this sort of vista, there was always the new chewing gum factory over at the other end of town to look at—and gum is so soothing!

I certainly wish I knew how these authors can go skidding off on little detours and somehow slide back onto the main road without a jolt. Here I am stranded in Newport, as it were, and somehow I must leap on to the Amsterdam Roof, as I've just recalled another venture I was in about this time when I was dashing in and out of vaudeville engagements. Well, anyway, this

show was called *The Boy and the Girl* and while it was a good little thing, it literally froze to death. It opened on the Amsterdam Roof too early in the season for the Outdoor Sports. Automobiles were then enough of a novelty to be featured and I had an act using a funny child's size car worked by the passenger's legs. The trouble of trying to get me out of it with the help of a comedy fire department and some of the funny business with the tools was a riot and remains in my memory as one of my best bits of foolishness. The music of this offering was good. The girls were pretty and the lines witty. Well, in the show business if it isn't one kind of a frost it's another.

One day as I was sitting in the luxury of my apartment at 1566 Broadway with a maid and a Jap cook, waiting for the manicurist to do my hands and a hairdresser to arrange my hair, a girl friend came in. The telephone rang and I nonchalantly took down the receiver without stirring from the couch. It was Alfred Aarons representing Koster and Bial and they wanted to put me into vaudeville. "I couldn't think of

it," I said and hung up the receiver. I lay back on my scented satin pillow and the visitor said, "I'd give half my life to get that work," and immediately I was sorry. "All right," I replied, "we'll write a sketch."

I took the telephone again and told Aarons I had changed my mind. I was willing to work, but I wouldn't work alone.

"Oh, Lord, what have we done now," my caller cried. "I haven't any clothes. I haven't a darned thing, but this shirt-waist."

"All right," I said, "we'll call it *Twenty Minutes in Shirt-waists,*" and I went out and bought myself some. Well, it was a tremendous success and was aided by the fact that my friend played the piano well and sang. We ended with a burlesque operatic song then new and the act was a riot. Which proved again to me that every time I tried to do anything for myself it was a failure and every time I tried to do something for others it was a success.

Walter Jones next came to me with the well worn gag, "I'm busted!"

"Well," I said, "let's go into vaudeville. It

has never hurt me. We'll write an act. We must do something out of the ordinary."

"What can we do out of the ordinary?" he asked dubiously.

I thought a minute, then I said, "I'll tell you what. We'll put all the furniture in a forest set." Thus, the upright piano was placed at the entrance to a country lane and the parlor furniture strewed around all cozy in the great open spaces where a stuffed "sofy" is still a stuffed "sofy" and looks funnier than even a stuffed sofa has any right to look. Even I didn't look natural, for I was standing on my head when the curtain went up. Nobody else was on. After an interval I dropped down and stretched, remarking, "Best rest I've had in weeks," which always brought a roar.

This sketch did not last long, in spite of the way it went over with the audience. Both Walter and I grew restless and decided to break up the partnership. Vaudeville is really too hard a game anyhow twice a day over and over again and on some circuits so many performances that one is reminded of the tired vaudevillian

who demanded of the manager: "What do you think we are—fillums?" When I did go into vaudeville, however, I never shirked, but always tried to give them something new. If it was the same style of work, I put it in another setting and I seldom had any trouble getting material as the ideas I used were generally my own.

Before I leave the subject of Walter Jones, I might add that it was with him that I won the cake for the best cake walking at Madison Square Garden for the Oscar Hammerstein benefit. Indeed, Walter and I were pioneers in the cake walk for white folks. When the cake was brought to us Walter said, "I don't want the blamed thing."

I did not want it either, but I thought it would be rude to refuse it, so I entered a hansom and took the huge cake in my lap. Nobody offered to help me home with it and there I sat helplessly surrounded by a yelling, cheering mob. I had just ordered the driver to start when he hit the horse, which promptly went down on his knees, shooting me and the cake beyond his ears into the street. Fortunately a comedienne's

training is not without advantage at such times since one expects to be laughed at, but of course there are moments, too, when one longs to make people cry.

Strangely enough it was usually Englishmen who thought of me for tragic roles. When George Edwards returned to London after a brief visit in America he carried back word that he had seen two artists—David Warfield and Marie Dressler. He was determined that I should appear in the city of fogs under his management and was one of the few men who made me such an offer who did not promptly die. Sir Herbert Tree approached me for a production of magnitude and immediately died. Augustin Daly planned to use me in a play of a serious nature and followed the example of Sir Herbert. Louis Calvert laid out some Shakespearian rôles with me and promptly shuffled off these mortal coils. Between them all, if they had lived, they might have made an actress out of me. At any rate, they all felt that I could do tragic rôles, and of course, like every poet who wants to write prose and every sign

painter who thinks he is a landscape artist, I always wanted to sob around the stage. I will never forget my first chance.

It was in *La Pericol,* back in the days of the Baker Opera Company. Many a time I had felt that if I could only appear in the "vermin" robes of the prima donna I would look like her and play better. The principal was taken ill and I had my opportunity. I swept on to the stage prepared to treat the audience to something it would never forget. I did! The fellow who played the jailer was a broken-down drunk who gave out the wardrobe and played small parts. On this particular night he was in a drunken slumber behind some trunks when he was dragged forth and kicked upon the stage. When I rushed on inquiring anxiously, "Jailer, is he violent?" it was his line to say, "No, if he makes a move, strong men will come and chain him to the wall." When, therefore, I cried tragically, "Jailer, is he violent?" he retorted: "I don't give a damn if he is! I don't give a damn if the damn show closes!" They rang down the curtain and my first and only appear-

ance as a tragedienne was a flop. Of course, my heart was broken, but in due course the secret yearning for tragic rôles returned, and finally, when my mother's death, after several years of ill health, made possible for the first time a trip to England, I crossed to find Edwards scurrying around trying to find me a play.

While he was worrying about it, Sir Alfred Butt, at that time just All Butt, came along and said, "Why don't you play a few weeks at the Palace?" and then Sir Oswald Stoll offered me the Coliseum. This was a tremendous triumph for me, because the Palace audience moved over en masse to the Coliseum. Then three backers suggested that I put on for them *Philopina* which had been played in America as *Higgledy Piggledy*. There was a great deal of feeling against American shows and producers, which I think perfectly ridiculous, because I believe that all countries are better for an exchange of artists. However, there seemed very little chance for my show and everybody predicted it would fail before I began rehearsing it. Indeed, the Empire Burlesque was so sure of this

that it offered me some £300 per week while I was rehearsing. Those who foretold bad luck were right. I could not give the tickets away and Edwards died before he could get me a play.

Following the failure of this show I was taken very ill and was brought home for an operation. Before leaving, however, I insisted that my jewelry, furniture, etc. be pawned and I borrowed $5000 from Sir Oswald Stoll to pay everybody a two weeks' salary. When I went back to London several years later, I was told that this sum was never paid and nobody knew what had become of the money, the scenery and the costumes, but at the time I tried to do all I could before I collapsed. When I came to, I discovered my friends had put me into bankruptcy. I nearly died, for the doctor who attended me cut my tonsils while I had an ulcerated throat and I developed a wonderful case of blood poisoning for which I was presented with a bill for $2000. I thought $250 was enough and paid this, together with all bills for which I felt a moral obligation, despite the bankruptcy proceedings.

On returning to London twelve years later and being told that none of the money I had left there had ever been paid, I put up $5000 to compensate everybody for two weeks' time, only to have $12,500 additional demanded. I am fond of England, but must admit it is too expensive for me. Certainly I have never taken anything out of the country, but always put more into it than I made there.

After this first London venture, came *Tillie's Nightmare,* which was the biggest achievement of my career. As the rôle called for an extensive wardrobe and I had very little money and wished to be as sparing as possible of it, I decided to make my own clothes. I had always constructed my funny clothes, but this was a different proposition. Not only lack of cash but the indifference of dressmakers hurled me into the business, for when I asked for a silver coat, which was to be worn over a pink velvet dress, they insisted it could not be made. Whereupon, I bought yards of silver lace and went to it. I was very proud when the papers raved over this, my wedding gown, and other "Paris" creations. Since

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The burlesque of "The Girl of the Golden West" is a classic memory.

then I make practically all my clothes and enjoy it. I never use a pattern and all I need is to get the back of a dress to copy it. The front takes care of itself because I can see it. I find it very hard not to go up to a passing lady and say, "I'm so glad to see your back. I'm going to make one like it."

It is a great relief to be rid of those endless fittings which used to harass me in the days when I saw something I liked and said, "I'll take that."

"Call Miss Cajunks," says the grand saleslady, "she will take your measurements."

Then the clan gathers, Miss Cajunks looking very sad, as all fitting women do for some reason or other.

"When can we have Miss Dressler?" says someone with unction. It is plainly a great favor they are doing me. After endless consultation of little red books, it is finally decided regretfully that I may enter the sacred precincts the following Thursday.

Then come at least a dozen interesting invitations I want to accept, but decline because does

not my fatal fitting come on Thursday? I go. I bow. They bow. Everything is very happy. We are still friends. And then molasses begins to gum up the pitcher, as it were.

"When will the next fitting be?" There is great agitation. Miss Cajunks is sent for again. She is still sorrowful. It is plain to see she does not like her job. They never do apparently. After more consultation and delay, it is decided that I may come on Wednesday. Now on Wednesday I had planned to lunch with some very dear friends and go to a matinee, but I stoically give this up. After it is too late for me to arrange anything else for the day, the telephone rings to announce that they are very sorry but they will not be ready for me and then I hate the dress and everybody connected with it. By the next Wednesday I go again to the shop. The gown is put on and everybody is called in to view it. They nearly die with ecstasy and then I know for sure that I picked out the wrong one.

Finally the "beau-u-ti-ful gown" comes home and I feel as if I had worn it a year. I get

into it and find all the pins must have slipped at the last fitting because the whole thing is wrong. In patient resignation I take the garment back and everybody admits it is wrong and calls on heaven to witness, "How could we have made this mistake?"

Poor Miss Cajunks with her mournful smile is called in again and suggests that I return "Next Thursday"—Thursday, what a fatal day! I go back and everything is wrong, but I am completely whipped. I take the battered raiment as graciously as possible, followed by the assurances of the whole staff that it looks "just lovely" on me and when I get home I rip it all up, which I might as well have done in the first place. Many of these experiences have convinced me that I cannot buy anything ready made. When they try to make it large enough it looks large.

Curiously enough I have always been besieged to make my friends little frocks. Once, while I was in Italy visiting Lady Colbrook, she said, "That is a darling little frock you have on. I wish I wasn't so busy painting. I forget my clothes."

"My goodness," I said, "there is no reason why you should not have one like it. I'll run you up a little dress if you will go out with me and select the material." Now the Italians are notoriously slow. If they promise something for Tuesday one may be sure that it will never turn up till a week from then, if then. Consequently, when we went to shop, bought some voile, and Lady Colbrook went back in the afternoon attired in the gown I had made her in order to buy some more voile for another, the proprietor was stunned. He said nothing, however. Lady Colbrook bought some more material and I made that up that night. By that time it was getting a habit with us and we went back in the morning to purchase still extra material, Lady Colbrook wearing the second gown. At this incredible sight the proprietor was completely stunned, not to say dazed, and could no longer resist comment. "Madame must have a great many dressmakers at work," he ventured, and when he found I was responsible, I became the wonder of all Venice. Indeed, everybody began wanting me to make dresses and I could

have started a season at that work if I had been so inclined.

I also make my own hats, though I admit I never designed one and trimmed it for the front that I didn't turn it around and wear it in the back. When I get through with a hat there is no second hand value to it. Indeed, the soup rights are absolutely negligible. In proof of this might be mentioned an experience I had with a Customs House official upon returning from one trip abroad. I had crammed all my hats together to bring back to be fixed for less fortunate friends. When I was called upon for a declaration I had none to make, but when the inspector opened my box of hats I could see his eye gleam hopefully. He began fishing down into my box dragging up dilapidated headgear after dilapidated headgear. At last he wiped his brow and said disdainfully, "Well, I guess you *ain't* got nothin' to declare!"

Knowing my hobby for sewing, even young men sometimes bring me material saying, "Thought it would make a nice dress for you," and they sit around watching me make it.

"When will it be done?" they ask. "We must have a party," and are often surprised when I say it will be done in an hour. Joseph Riter, knowing my proportions, always buys me generous lengths! Of course, I like things that are different and, consequently, I often buy my accessories in the upholstery department. I may see the braid I buy there on a chair, but I never meet it on another woman's dress.

I have often been asked the exact state of my feelings when approaching a piece of goods. Of course I never let it know I am afraid, but sometimes I admit I hesitate a long time when I have a piece of material that costs $12 to $25 a yard. Finally I say, "Take a chance, you darn fool," and we are off. My only rival I have found with an equally reckless pair of shears is Mrs. Colgate Hoyt.

To those who would like to try, but are timid, my advice is that of the boy to whom a frightened out-of-towner appealed for assistance. "I'd like to find Broadway," the newcomer said. To which the boy replied succinctly, "Who in hell's stopping you?"

IV

The Ugly Duckling Lays a Golden Egg

I COULD still be Rip Van Winkling in *Tillie's Nightmare*. I played it five years and, though several more have elapsed since, hardly a day passes that some stranger doesn't stop me on the street or ask me in a crowded elevator when I am going to do another play like *Tillie*. The public thinks it remembers "Tillie Blobbs," the boarding house drudge, because she was so funny. But I know better—it was the sincerity of her—the tears that glistened back of every laugh that makes her live. That is real comedy. The book and lyrics were by Edgar Smith and the music was by A. Baldwin Sloane. The pro-

duction was under the management of Lew Fields, backed by the Shuberts.

Yet, like many big successes, this show seemed a failure after its opening which took place in Albany. Many people were discharged from the cast because they were so bad and I felt there was no chance unless I took the play over and rewrote it. I believed in it and made the changes I realized were necessary, and when we opened again in Kansas City, it was a howling hit. At the next stop we packed the house and at this point the authors rushed back to New York and demanded that Shubert close the show. He sent them to Fields, who declared he could not do so without paying Dressler $1500 a week and the rest of the company would sue for their salaries. Fields came to Pittsburgh and sat in a box to see what had been done to the piece and almost went insane with delight over it. The next decision was that Ned Wayburn should come on and fix it up for New York. I said nothing except that the show girls, who stuck to me on the road, should not be displaced by others for Broadway. After Wayburn worked

on the show, people said it was not the same at all and I finally declared if things were not put back as I had arranged them, I would not open. Again I carried the day and we opened at last in New York at the Herald Square Theater.

Right at the height of our success I was taken out of the production on account of illness and this was supposed to be the finish of it for Broadway, but several failures followed the closing of *Tillie,* and I was finally put on in it again, playing to bigger business than ever. This was, by the way, before the Weber and Fields' revival at the 44th Street Theater. Perhaps the one bit of the show which people best remember is my song: "Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl." So many have written me for the words that I give them herewith:

"A village maid was leaving home, her eyes with tears was wet,
Her mother dear was standing near the spot.
She says to her—'Neuralgia, dear, I hope you won't forget
That I'm the only mother you have got.
The city is a wicked place, as anyone can see,

And cruel dangers round your path may swirl,
So every week you'd better send your wages home to me,
For heaven will protect the working girl.'

'You are going far away
But remember what I say,
When you are in the city's giddy whirl;
From temptations, crimes, and follies
Villains, taxicabs, and trolleys
Oh—heaven will protect the working girl.'

Her dear old mother's words proved true, for soon the poor girl met
A man who on her ru-in was intent;
He treated her respectful, as villains always do,
And she supposed he was a perfect gent.
But she found different when one night he lured her out to dine
Into a table-dotey, blithe and gay;
And he said to her—'Now after this, we'll have a demi-tasse',
Then to him the brave girl these words did say:

'Stand back, villain, go your way.
Here I will no longer stay;
Although you were a Marquis or a Earl
You may tempt the upper classes
With your villainous demi-tasses
But heaven will protect the working girl'!"

Besides the song, the lines which for some reason are almost invariably remembered are:

Those happy days on the farm!

Customer

"Say, do you keep stationery?"

Tillie

"No, I keep moving around all the time."

* * * * *

"Ma hasn't been out of the kitchen except to go to bed for ten years. She did get out doors once—to a funeral—but she smelled so of fried onions she spoiled everybody's pleasure."

* * * * *

"There's dozens and dozens of parks where folks with homes can sit all day and all night if they like, but if a feller without a home tries it, they chase him away."

* * * * *

"I sleep any old place and get my meals out."

* * * * *

"Suffering mackerel, how I love hats! If I had a million dollars I'd have two hats and a couple of fresh eggs once in awhile!"

* * * * *

"Sim's a multiplied millionaire."

* * * * *

"Tink, if I was to live a thousand years, I couldn't pay you back for all the prunes I poked into you at Ma's boarding house."

* * * * *

"I haven't been able to keep anything on my stomach for three weeks but the hot water bag."

* * * * *

"Would it be asking too much of you, Sim, to take me one side and marry me?"

* * * * *

"The champagne never touched me. It went right in and turned around and came right out again."

* * * * *

"Calling me is getting to be a habit with Ma. She does it unconscious. Yesterday I was standing right alongside of her in the kitchen when she was talking to the guinea vegetable man and she said—'Give me two bunches of beets—Tillee! and a peck of—Tillee! and a dozen ears of—Tillee! and six turnips and—'."

* * * * *

"Your Rockafella isn't wearing any medals as Coal Oil Johnny either. I did think he was blowing himself on flowers for you till I found out he was chummy with Berryman, the undertaker."

* * * * *

"But if you got rich and famous, I couldn't keep up with you. I ain't educated like Maude. Ma never let me go to school much. She said foolosopy and physiognomy and Parlee vous Francis ruined many a good dish washer. I don't believe I could ever mingle with the hoi polloi and the demi-monde."

* * * * *

The plot of *Tillie's Nightmare* was that very old, yet always popular Cinderella theme. Tillie was a poor drudge in her mother's boarding-

house, while her sister Maude was beautiful and idle. But unlike Cinderella, the glory that came to Tillie was only her dream, and, in the last scene, she was just where she started in the first act.

The financial success of *Tillie's Nightmare* enabled me to purchase the home for which I had always longed. While on a motor trip, I passed a big white house in Windsor, Vermont, and, well, I just had to own it! Of course I was making so much more money than ever before that I thought I was the Astors and Vanderbilts rolled into one. Anyhow, I said right off the bat, "I'll take that place," and, heaven help me, I did! The barn had stalls for sixteen cows so I bought sixteen cows, and I shall never forget how happy I was when the first slip arrived showing I had made $90 on the darn things. I'll say I was excited, but that was nothing to my thrill when a bill followed showing that it cost $201 to make the $90.

Finally I had word from the man who ran the place, stating he had a wonderful chance to sell the cows. I rode all night so as to get there

for the sale, and, as long as I live, I'll never forget that early morning drive through the snow and crisp air. The would-be-buyer lived in New Hampshire and was choking over a terrible hard luck story that made my heart very warm. It always gets warm at such critical times! By then I had twenty cows, but I beseeched him to take them all for $500 and pay me when he could. He gave me $50 down and I have never seen the man, the cows or the money from that day to this.

The sale of the cows was effected two years after my purchase of the place. A year later I sold the property to pay my expenses in the war campaign. I think the final straw in my decision to free myself of this responsibility was not only need of money but disgust because the clockwork of the place would stop if I wasn't there to wind it. All my experiences were similar. For example, I sank a whole wheel barrow load of bright dollars into hardy plants of which I am inordinately fond, only to discover that they may be hardy, but not foolhardy.

The spinning wheel that broke up my home!

A dream that came true through "Tillie's Nightmare."

There didn't seem to be anybody on the place with sense enough to take care of them.

Among other treasures, an old spinning wheel stood hospitably on the wide veranda. About this, with dogged patience, I trained running pink geraniums and ivy so that the two massed, encircled and covered the wheel. When the geraniums were in bloom against the ivy, the sight would have made my old friend Charlie Thorley's Fifth Avenue window wilt with envy! On one of my departures I went to every servant on the place and said, "Be sure when it gets cold to carry the spinning wheel into the kitchen. It is my treasure." Well, when I returned there was not enough left of that bountiful picture for a mess of spinach! Even the roots were frozen! It was a freeze-out for me, too, as I decided then and there that a home was out of the question unless one could stay with it. Such a procedure was impossible for me, of course, because I no sooner get settled in one spot than I am whisked off to Oshkosh or Africa.

Just the same, the place did furnish me with several thrills and a tremor or two the three

years I owned it, despite the expense and annoyances. I never tired of feeding and driving Brandy and Soda, my fine iron gray team, or Theodore Roosevelt, the ruminative horse given me for my mother's cart. Then there were the chickens! How I did love 'em! For the benefit of those who have never tried it, I here and now remark that there is nothing so marvelous as to set a hen. One in particular nearly wore me out. I would put the eggs under her and she would leave them. I would put more eggs under her and she would leave them. Every time I reasoned with her, she would promise to do better, but she was a regular Broadway hussy and could not bear to tie herself down to home duties. Finally after she had ruined half a dozen settings of eggs, I saw her sneaking off the seventh nest I had prepared. Whereupon, I went out and spanked her good and set her back. At that she settled down, staid on the job, and raised fourteen exceptionally fine chicks, which proves that my relationship to Catherine of Russia is not without its helpful side.

Another year I tried to raise ducks and geese.

I thought I was getting along splendidly, but was called away to play an engagement. When I returned I had one goose and one duck which I named Mutt and Jeff. They promptly took possession of the place. The chickens were kept off the lawn, but not so these two birds. They staid around the house with the cats and dogs and afforded us more than one good laugh. When the weather was very hot, the goose used to be subject to fainting spells. The minute it keeled over, I would rush and get a pail of water to throw over it. Meantime the duck would sit down beside the larger bird waiting for it to come to, for all the world like a trained nurse. Fainting over, these two strange birds always took an afternoon walk. Often the parrot would join them, but their brave strut threw him into raucous laughter that infuriated the less intelligent creatures in front of him.

One day the cook said, "Don't you think I'd better kill off some of the older fowl and make room for the new broods coming on?"

I was quite agreed, of course, until I returned one Sunday to find the table graced with a mag-

nificent bird which we all immediately knew to be Jeff. "Take him away," I cried, "we can't eat Jeff," and it was then I devised my famous dish of tomatoes and stewed steak ends.

I tried to learn how to do everything on the farm. When I first bought the place I insisted on learning how to milk the cows, lest I have to do it some time. Sure enough, one morning I found the "hired" man cruelly mistreating a horse. I made him walk to the nearest railroad station with his wife and belongings and was glad I had learned to milk sixteen cows.

Toby, the laughing parrot, who made so much fun of Mutt and Jeff, often sat on my shoulder while I pursued my way over my hard earned estate. I bought him in Seattle when I was playing in *Tillie's Nightmare* and he was quite as amusing as that laugh-provoking play. He always traveled with me and his favorite trick when we reached a hotel was to rush to the telephone calling, "Give me the bar." He would cry like a baby if he wanted anything and laugh like a hyena when he accomplished his desire. While sitting in the dressing-room at the theater,

he listened eagerly for the music to start, and when the orchestra began he would dance around and around ecstatically crying, "Oh, mother! Oh, mother!" I bought a canary to keep him company and the darn thing nearly drove him crazy flying over his head. He sang very well after he heard Tetrazzini and made me quite wretched, when I had left him in Vermont one winter, by saying, upon seeing me, "Are you cold? The poor boy! Are you cold?" When the canary was taught to hop about the table with a little paper cart and haul me back a lump of sugar, he nearly expired with jealousy. One of his most amusing experiences was in California, where his cage was being moved with some other traps via motor. Toby was alone on the back seat behind the driver and a companion. Suddenly they noticed that everybody they passed was laughing and staring. Looking back they discovered that rascally parrot walking up and down the back of the rear seat laughing and shouting, "Ha! Ha! For God's sake!"

My next departure from my dogs and other pets came about because many performers were

out of work and I determined to put on a show to give them something to do. It was called Marie Dressler's *Merry Gambol* and contained much good stuff. The scenery consisted of curtains, and the whole production was just enough in advance of the times so that people did not know whether it was good or not, and a flop resulted. Later Murray Anderson came along with the same sort of thing and was rewarded with a big success. One of our most amusing scenes was a travesty on *Camille* played by Yorska, but I must admit that, marvelous as she was at rehearsal, she never seemed to get over the footlights. One of the lines of this skit went, "The doctor says if I don't die this winter I'll live till spring." Later I took this production to San Francisco where it was a success. Of course I lost a great deal of money on the venture, but it did not eat into me as it does into some who gamble and lose. I never weep over lost money, for I figure I'd rather go to the poorhouse once than go there every day. When my family has not had the first call on my money, it has usually gone in helping fellow artists, or

Charles Chaplin, Marie Dressler and Mabel Normand in the movie "Tillie's Punctured Romance."

in the war, and in one or two enterprises I started not so much on my own account as to aid others.

My next experience was extremely thrilling. I was convalescing in Los Angeles and went with my nurse to a movie show, as I am very fond of pictures, although I do not think they are in the right hands. Indeed, I consider the picture game the first Woolworth idea since the ten cent store. When it is understood that one hundred prints were made of each film and between ninety to ninety-five of these strips were running every day at $25 each, thus making the earning power of each individual film about $2250 per day or about three quarters of a million per year, it is to know that it was a great game. Furthermore, all communities used to have their little film houses where a woman could go with four children and rest and think she was in a theater. Then men came along and built theaters to hold from one thousand to five thousand people. They set ten films working per day instead of ninety, raised the prices to exorbitant rates, sold stock, paid tremendous swivel chair salaries, engaged big orchestras, dancers and singers, with

the result that they killed their own game because they were licked by capital charges before they were started. And yet they closed all the little community theaters so that if the small places were *presented* with a picture it would not be shown. Most important of all, the woman who before had been able to forget for a moment the dishwashing and the fact her husband had left her seventy-five cents when he knew she needed two-seventy-five, was forced to remain at home. Cooped up again with no outlet after she had known relaxation that cost her no more than her husband's daily chewing gum and smokes, she became quarrelsome and did her bit to help the divorce statistics mount.

I believe the picture game is bound to live, despite censors composed of grafters and thin-lipped women who never slipped because they never had the chance and don't believe in God or they could not be so narrow minded. The reason I believe the movies will live is because if we pick up a book we like to look at the pictures, which after all are unexcelled propaganda when illiterate people must be reached. I be-

lieve the game will live despite the fact that the really great people seldom have an opportunity to make pictures. The artist is not permitted to direct and the actor is a poor judge of picture values, while the directors engaged frequently have no more training than they acquired by learning to drive somebody's motor. I believe in pictures despite the fact that my own experiences with them have not been altogether profitable. But of course there must be a beginning.

Well, as I said before, my nurse and I sought a picture show. As we went in I saw a man looking at me and I remarked:

"There's a man who wants his fare back to New York. He's going to speak."

Sure enough the man with him came up to me and said, "We'd like to talk to you."

"I'll see you at my hotel," I replied, for I was in no mood for a hard luck story and was not equal to standing to listen to it.

The man I had first noticed waited with wild eyes and let the other do all the talking, but after the picture he accompanied the speaker to my hotel and I learned that he was Mack

Sennett and his friend was Bauman of the Keystone pictures.

They announced, "We want to get into good houses. We believe we can do so with a name like yours."

It was all so unexpected that I did not know what to say and the following day they came again. They made me the proposition that I was to own half the picture when made: that it was to be leased but never sold: they were to put it on and send me a statement every week. When I finally agreed, I went up on the lot and looked around till I found Charlie Chaplin, who was then unknown. I picked him out and also Mabel Normand, to whom I had taken a fancy, and started in to make the picture, known to most of the fans, called *Tillie's Punctured Romance.*

I think the public will agree that I am a good picker, for it was the first real chance Charlie Chaplin ever had and he has since proven his worth while Mabel Normand is one of the most capable and conscientious actresses on the screen. Many a time I have seen her brave a director—

"Tillie" in some little things she ran up herself.

and directors won't allow anybody to tell them anything—and say just as they were starting to shoot a scene, "I don't feel that. If I do that, why do I do it? Perhaps the other girl was right in her view. I'm just trying to get it," which showed that she was doing her utmost to get the best out of herself and the picture.

A great many people do not film well and never understand the mechanics of pictures. Fortunately for me I became camera wise immediately. The thing was as alive to me as an audience and I loved it. We had such a good time making this picture that Charlie Chaplin and Mabel Normand cried when we were through with our fourteen weeks labor on it and I was ready to leave Los Angeles.

After the picture was made, I returned to New York and saw the darned thing hawked about for nine long weeks. As fast as it was shown in the projection rooms it was turned down. Nobody would take it, perhaps because the comedy was somewhat in advance of the times and then a little new. I was sure it would make good sometime, and was reminded of my brother-

in-law, Richard Ganthony's experience, when his ultimate triumph, *A Message from Mars,* laid in Charles Frohman's office for seven years before it was produced.

Meantime, the makers of my first picture were hard pressed for money and things looked exceedingly black. Finally we received a hearing and the minute it was shown in an actual theater it was a triumph. I have heard of lines several blocks long standing to get into the second matinee and evening performance of this picture and eight men have told me that *Tillie's Punctured Romance* built their theaters.

In spite of this success I was eventually obliged to go to law over a division of the profits. When it came to a settlement, I said I wanted $50,000 and the return of the picture after five years. Everybody thought this was very amusing, as the picture would be dead by then, but the terms were granted. I let the film lie for two years and then leased it again. According to my new agreement I was to receive $25,000 down and a weekly royalty, but again the picture has turned out a hoodoo as far as

receipts go, as I cannot get any accounting from the second producer, although the film is still being shown. Anyway, the business side of the moving picture business has always been too complicated for me. There are too many middlemen.

Following my first picture, I took part in *The Mix Up,* a non-musical show which made good after I had rewritten it. Bert Lytell, his wife, and I played this for a season on the road with success and then rushed it into New York on account of some lighting effects which I had invented that seemed about to be stolen. We went into the 39th Street Theater and the play died.

Meantime, *Tillie's Punctured Romance* was drawing such crowds that I was asked to make another picture. This was called *Tillie Wakes Up,* which many liked better than the earlier vehicle, but it came very near to being my finish. It is the tale of a neglected wife and a neglected husband in adjoining flats. They decide to go to Coney Island in an open taxi and are rammed by another conveyance of the same

character. Terrified at being surrounded by a curious crowd and fearful lest their pictures get in the papers they jump into an ice wagon, freeze into the ice, and have to be chopped out. After a chase, they jump into another auto, dash upon the beach, and into the water.

As the car could not, of course, float, it was put on a raft and we were towed out quite a distance and then turned loose. John Hines, who played the neglected husband, was on the front seat and I was on the back. After we had floated out some distance we felt the car toppling and Hines jumped. This upset the car and I found myself being closed into the hood which frightened me extremely. I finally managed to extricate myself, however, and dived to the bottom. Fortunately I headed for land without knowing it. Meantime, the five thousand spectators on shore and the camera men were frantic. They were glad indeed when I came up again, but no happier than I. As it was, the experience was such as to knock my nerve so that I could not go on with the scene for two days. Besides these two well known films,

Tillie's Tomato Surprise and several two-reelers were the only pictures I ever did, with the exception of a picture burlesque of a melodrama which was quite amusing.

People seemed to enjoy my picture work just as they have those things I have done on the legitimate stage and where they have made comments that seemed helpful I have always listened, trying to profit by suggestions. I really consider that the constructive critics of the old days made me and cannot speak too feelingly of the debt of gratitude I owe them. Among those who have given me both praise and sound advice are Acton Davies who did me many a good turn, Franklin Fyles, Charles Darnton, William Winter of the *Tribune,* Louis De Foe of *The World,* Crosby and Clapp of Boston, McNally of *The Boston Herald,* Charles Howard of *The Globe,* Alan Dale of the *American* and Archie Bell of *The Cleveland Press* who at one time did the best stage stuff that was written. There is only one critic who I consider ever gave me an unfair deal.

Everybody was furnishing me marvelous

notices and I think his notice would not have been virulent except that he came to my show intoxicated. He did not know how to get to his seat and when he went out he fell over the audience. Somebody laughed at him and he indulged in a fight in the lobby. The next morning his review of my show was the most cruel thing I have ever read. However, I feel that all the critics in the world cannot ruin one who is out determined to do his best, and I have never done anything half heartedly, whether it was a benefit, a regular performance or as a judge of flea jumping.

Indeed, one of the best shows I ever put on was at French Lick for the benefit of the help. The guests nearly battered down the doors to get in, but were not admitted. The priceless part of the performance to me was the antics of an old English maid I had with me at the time. Of course I let myself go to get the laughs and every time my skirt went up a little too high, my old maid would dash out and pull it down, which of course made everybody howl all

The hen that wouldn't settle down until she was spanked.

the more. Needless to say I never wanted for anything at that resort after this experience.

I think my ability to see and put through one idea at a time has helped me to be successful and the lesser triumphs gave me courage and strength for perhaps the most difficult period of my life, war work—war had no terror for me! It was pie for me! My whole life had been a fight!

V

The Ugly Duckling Floats into Society

THOUGH the thunder of war was in the air and I knew I should be in the midst of things the minute our forces were ready, I took sort of a last fling at the Century Theater where I went from another flop for me which was written by James Forbes and called *Sweet Genevieve.* Our newest opportunity—*The Century Girl*—did not look any too good. Indeed, I never saw performers so paralysed by any vehicle as this show.

Everybody kept going around saying, "How do these people dare take this big theater and give us no material?" Leon Errol, Harry Kelly,

Sam Bernard and others besides myself were engaged for this production, but we had no book with which to work.

Among other things we were given a tremendous scene of gigantic rocks called *The Stone Age* and were expected to play a cold little drama in it. I chanced to see the *Ballet Russe* just at this time and took Leon Errol down to look at it, explaining an idea that had occurred to me for a new scene which we would call *The Ballet's Loose.* Errol liked the scheme and, when we returned, we took it up with Victor Herbert who wrote the music which helped make the act.

As I figured it out, Harry Kelly was to be my husband and we opened the scene with my dancing in, singing, "Good morning," to which the others danced, "How d'ye do?" Then Kelly, my husband, according to good cave man etiquette, dashed out to get my lizards' tongues or goat ears or other favorite wild woman meat. Meantime, Leon Errol came hopping from crag to crag and I could see right away I was going to be mad about him. We began rolling over one

another down the crags, and suddenly Kelly, seeing us from a topmost boulder, came crawling toward us on his stomach. Sneaking up behind Errol, he hit him on the head—biff, bim!

Errol, thinking I was playing with him, began shaking his finger saying, "Naughty, naughty"—one of the best pantomimes to music ever done. Finally, as Kelly kept belaboring him, the truth of the situation began to percolate into his savage mind, and a fierce and funny duel ensued. Meantime, I bravely fled from the scene by climbing the rocks. Just as I was nearly safe, the rock with which Kelly was killed by Errol hit me, so that I rolled down on Errol and finished him. It really was a riot and the audience laughed itself limp. It was the *Ballet's Loose* all right—very loose. I don't know to this day which of us was the loosest.

However, the producers decided to save my salary and cut me out. The play failed, perhaps because fate decided I should be kept for a worse death. It might have failed anyhow, but many have said that *The Stone Age* alone would have kept it going if Errol, Kelly and I

had continued to play it. It is interesting to note that I never had more wishes for success than at the opening of this play. From a drift of telegrams, might be set down a few from the top layer.

May your hit be as big as everyones love for you if it is the theater will have to be rebuilt to hold it.

MARGARET AND EDGAR SELWYN.

Good Luck.

COHAN & HARRIS.

Do your best tonight for the sake of our children send me a thousand dollars we need a ton of coal.

R. H. BURNSIDE.

Good luck I know you will be a scream.

GENE BUCK.

Every success.

SUNSHINE GIRLS.

Good luck.

IRVING D. BERLIN.

Looks like you are going to be one big success I hope so.

FRED WARD.

Wish I were in NY to see you tonight have ordered you some flowers instead good luck and much love.

FLORENCE BACHE.

Heaps of good luck big sister am holding thumbs love.

LOUISE DRESSER.

Good luck and love.

ANNE CALDWELL.

Put over another Tilly Blobbs and well all be happy cordially. WM. RAYMOND SILL.

Wish you success and long prosperous engagement.

M. S. Bentham.

We are all praying this may be your greatest success.

Francois Lemont.

I hope you fall on a certain party good luck.

Raymond Hubbell.

Success now and always.

Edmund Goulding.

Wishes for success and good luck on your opening night from the newyork state womans suffrage party.

Harriet Burton Laidlaw.
Ida Blair.

Hope to be your agent thus wishing you success.

Max Hart.

Love and success to you and the show am better.

Josephine Hall.

Success and a year's run.

Julian Eltinge.

Best wishes for success.

Edgar Smith.

Many are superstitious about good wishes, but it is pleasant to have had them even if I did fall off the ship. If Charles Dillingham were not so amusing, I should perhaps bear him a grudge for being dropped overboard, but I have always found him to have a ready tongue which entertains me greatly. Once, while motoring through White Plains where he owned a place with

Charles Frohman, I encountered him in his car.

"Hello, Marie," he greeted me.

"Hello, Charles," I replied. "I hear they're thinking of adding you to the Social Register because you've got a lake."

"Lake!" he spluttered, quick as could be. "———! I had one, but some sneak came along with a sponge and stole it!"

Following my experience in *The Century Girl,* the United States plunged into war and I went into the service of the country. I placed myself and my energy at the disposal of the government and began a strenuous life of going where I was sent, defraying my own expenses and thankful I had anything to defray with.

As an example of the energy I unloosed I might mention that in one drive I made one hundred and forty-nine speeches in twenty-nine days, never speaking to less than five thousand. Sometimes I asked celebrated persons to write these talks for me, but, when the moment came that I went upon the platform, I always forgot everything I had meant to say and impromptu words

came to me. Sometimes, I scolded, sometimes, I coaxed—my methods varied.

If it seemed to meet the situation to crawl under a table from General Pershing's side at a banquet, I did that. Indeed, I have always feared that I defeated Pershing's chances of becoming president. Upon one occasion in the West when we were leaving a platform where we had both spoken, a number of excited voices cried out, "Pershing for President—Pershing for President," which was immediately answered from the other side by, "Marie Dressler for Vice-President."

"If you go to the White House," I said to Pershing, "I will go too," and I could see right there that his hopes were blasted. He never seemed to take any interest in the nomination after that.

The war period was one of the most stirring in my history and I could write a big book about that alone. Some of it I cannot remember without tears. There were so many deeds of heroism at home as well as on the battlefield. Once, when I was selling Liberty bonds, a sailor walked up,

© *by Byron*

My favorite stage photograph as the Pickle King's daughter with Joe Weber in "Higgledy-Piggledy."

took a hundred dollars in bills from his pocket and handed them to me.

"For a bond," he said, turning away quickly.

"But where shall I send it?" I called after him.

He shrugged, made a little gesture with his hands and strode into the mist.

More publicity has been given to the farmer who bought a bond and then wrote to say he wished to be informed when the interest was due so he could pay it on time! And some have heard of the armless workman, out of a job, and unfamiliar with English, who insisted on climbing on my platform to give me sixty-six dollars, which was all he had in the world. Even more pathetic than this was a little old lady of seventy-two whom I met in California, in a little town in the red woods, ninety miles from any railroad. She had been following the news of the war with eager interest and noting that the nation had been asked to conserve oil, she would not burn any in her tiny lamp. Moreover, in order to buy war saving stamps, this poor frail creature had been walking up to a mining camp to get the washing and the mending of the men. Since

she could not burn oil, she rose at daybreak to do the sewing. I discovered the story only because she came to me to ask what sort of a frame she should buy to enclose the stamps for a wall ornament and was absolutely dumbfounded when I told her they possessed a money value.

If I had ever doubted the existence of a divine spark in my fellows, the sacrifices I saw during my travels at this period would have entirely reconvinced me.

I never could keep out of a good fight and in the year following the close of the war, I jumped into the Equity scrap of 1919. I went into this for principle, as did many others, but it was more or less a merry war and everybody derived considerable amusement from it. As the reviewers said, it really was entertaining to see participants discussing their wrongs over a table at the Algonquin or Ritz, and young women with charge accounts at well known jewelers weeping into grape fruit supreme as they recounted their stage oppression under "K & E or Jake and Lee."

My own particular job was organizing the chorus girls, and of course, having been one myself, I relished being General of the Chorus Amazons. My friend, Karl K. Kitchin, in chronicling my activities at this time in *The World* said:

"Miss Marie Dressler, through her organization of the chorus girls' branch of the Equity, found herself the cynosure of all eyes; and while she didn't cause the Hippodrome to close she got the credit of it. There is no question that she was a strike heroine, and an ample one. In fact, she is of the stuff that two or three heroines could have been made of. Her suggestion that both she and David Belasco were old enough to retire caused as much amusement in certain circles as Charles Dillingham's sign at the Hippodrome, following its enforced closing. The name of the attraction, *Happy Days,* was painted over with the words *'Nothing Doing'* with the result that the sign read, *'Nothing Doing, Twice Daily.'*"

About this period I was back again where I really belonged—broke. I knew that the quickest way to make some money was to take another

whirl in vaudeville, so I sent my agent, Alf Wilton, to Keith's where I had formerly made twenty-five hundred dollars a week. He returned to me much embarrassed.

"What's up?" I demanded.

"I don't quite know how to tell you, Miss Dressler," he stammered. "Your last salary was twenty-five hundred—"

"Yes, yes. Go on——"

"Well, I can't get your old salary," he apologized. "They say you have been out five years and must have deteriorated."

"All right," I retorted. "Perhaps I have. Go back and ask him how much I have deteriorated."

"They are willing to give you fifteen hundred dollars a week," he said, thinking he was insulting me.

Some people would have been incensed to be told they had deteriorated one thousand dollars a week, but I looked the situation in the face.

"There are blamed few folks," I said, "who can make fifteen hundred dollars a week," and I went at it. To my own surprise and theirs, this "come-back" proved a tremendous success. It

was agreed I had not deteriorated, for I played the Palace three weeks out of five.

I figured then and there that a time comes when people cannot or may not make the same money as previously and the fact should be accepted as gracefully as possible. The time even comes when earning money at a chosen calling is out of the question. When such a situation rises, people off the stage as well as on should be ready to resort to some other means of livelihood. If an artist or a poet starves because the world does not appreciate his talent in dollars, why should some other occupation be scorned? In watching theatrical people, penniless, and with no prospect of a job on the stage, I have never been able to understand why those who were clever enough to play in a show, could not be clever enough to try something else—sell goods over a counter or in some way be self-supporting when out of jobs. At any rate, when stage doors are barred to me, I shall be found either buying or selling winter flannels at Baltman's or balancing fish balls at Wild's.

Family trees should be left under the bureau

when entering upon a job paid by the public. If I were waiting on table, I should do the best I could and that is all there is to that. Whatever I do that is honest I know my real friends, whether in or out of society, will not be utterly shocked. Indeed, there are many Social Register people much finer than they are painted. When I first used to observe the "upper crust," I quickly recognized the fact that society always suffers from a fringe of climbers just as the stage is always blamed for the antics of those girls who call themselves actresses just because they have been "supers" in one performance or in a movie mob scene.

I am entertained, too, by the so-called society people who boast of their friends higher up or who are not quite sure whether it is all right to be seen with me because I'm an actress.

One good senator, waiting in the antechamber of our ambassador in Rome, and endeavoring not to be caught talking to me, nearly had a stroke, when our ambassador rushed out, saying, "Hello, Marie, dear! I'll be with you in a minute."

In "Tillie's Tomato Surprise"—another movie.

The poor dear member of Congress had to shuffle into another attitude quickly, as did a certain snobbish gentleman who rents an historic English castle. He married a girl I had known, but would never let her hunt me up when I was in the vicinity for fear it would ruin his prestige —or he may even have been afraid I would ruin his castle!

Then, one day in the London Ritz he encountered me in the midst of celebrities. Three days later he accompanied his wife on a call.

"I hear you have been in Rome," he began.

"Yes," I replied, thinking if he intended to hang all of his fine linen on the line, I would also. "I've been visiting our ambassador."

"Ah," he said, "if you go to Rome again, I will give you a card to the biggest man there— Count Costantini."

"Oh, my goodness," I smiled, attempting a sneer like a real stage villain-ness, "he's a dear friend of mine!"

We exchanged price tags, as it were, for several minutes. In the end I carried from him an important letter to the count whom I knew well

and with whose name my caller had been trying to impress me, although he himself knew the Italian only slightly.

I have had the experience on other occasions of being cut by friends who had climbed into a higher social position, only to have the people who gingerly picked them up later become closely associated with me. But I never bear ill will against these fear-burdened souls, for I am always sorry for those who feel unsure of themselves. Fear is the devil's greatest weapon—and he uses it all the time.

Then there are the pathetic marriage hunters. Abroad, my eye frequently fell on an anxious mother with two anaemic daughters whom she hoped to marry off. She always carried a little book, and her conversation consisted of, "Is So-and-So still living with So-and-So?" The answer received, she carefully put a ring around it.

"You'll get them living with the wrong people if you are not careful," I suggested, but nothing daunted her.

When all is said and done, I ought to be living

on blackmail money instead of tormenting my brokers to keep selling my stocks. However, fortunately, the higher the society, the less it worries about its position. While society make-believes are legion, there are also many sterling people and the truth is not always known about them.

I must pay tribute in particular to the late Frederick Townsend Martin, whom I first met at a tea at Sherry's, where the dowagers were not quite sure whether or not to accept me. Here Mrs. Louis Nixon poured oil on the troubled waters by saying in her beautiful, gracious way, "My boy has always been afraid to dance. I wonder if you would go on the floor with him?" which of course I did, the while remembering his father's famous *bon mot* whenever I approached, "Well, well, here comes the Oregon." Frederick Townsend Martin laughed when he sighted the breeze we made and foretold terrible things for the boy from such a start, but as a matter of fact, the dear chap married a lovely girl and settled down instead.

It was Frederick Townsend Martin who told

me something I have never forgotten. He said: "Don't let them dwarf you, Marie. Keep on expanding and remember that every time you reach out you're liable to meet a lot of suffering, but in the end you'll pluck a lot of sweetness." Very few know of the much real good this man did. Among other things he used to have a place on the Bowery where turkey dinners were served on holidays and other special occasions. This was not exactly a mission, but a spot where down-and-outers might congregate for cheer and companionship, not to mention smokes. Nordica used to go down there to sing and I did comedy and little songs. We always went in evening clothes and the derelicts we pulled in seemed to consider it a great compliment.

One night, when I sang a little mother song, twelve of these wanderers broke down and cried, perhaps because things seem nearer when one is in a small circle. At any rate, I always enjoyed Nordica more in those gatherings than on the concert stage, although I love music anywhere and any time. Schumann-Heink, Tetrazzini, Calvé, Hempel, Mary Garden, Scotti,

Caruso, and Edmund Burke have all been my friends, and I think we have mutually admired one another.

Besides Frederick Townsend Martin and Moncure Robinson, there were many famous New York beaux who were good to me. Among others were O. H. P. Belmont, Alfred Henry Lewis, Tom Brown, Harry Lehr, Stanford White, Steve Elkins, James R. Keene, John Davidson, Jack Follansbee, Major Dangerfield, Freddy Gebhardt, and Berry Wall. My, what a fashion plate the latter always was! After being most punctilious in his attire for years, he suddenly switched and now doesn't give a hop-toad what sort of blamed rag he appears in.

The girls were crazy about these chaps and I might have been if I had been able to keep up with them, but these old beaux of the time worked so fast that they might have been called Gotham Comets. My consolation is that I reserved my strength and those who are still alive now can't catch up with me. The slogan used to be, "Sow your wild oats when you are young."

I had no time then, but when I get to be seventy just look out for me!

Among those in society for whom I have the greatest respect are Mrs. Adolf Ladenburg and Mrs. Orme Wilson. As long as I live I shall never forget the former, one night in the Grand Hotel in Rome. A gorgeous ball was in progress, when Mrs. Ladenburg walked into a balcony to inspect the scene below. She wore a simple white evening gown with a circlet of green in her beautiful hair. So regal and splendid was her appearance that everything stopped and every eye turned in her direction. An inaudible murmur swept the room, but Mrs. Ladenburg, unconscious of having created a sensation, had already turned to descend the stairs. When she started for the ballroom, I believe every man on the floor rushed forward to escort her—princes, diplomats, poets of international reputation—all sought her favor. As for me, my heart nearly burst with pride because this queenly woman was an American—an American, and yet she dimmed the luster of every member of the nobility present! Even more delightful than this woman's

rare poise is the knowledge that if she knew and liked one she would always make excuses for one, no matter what happened. Indeed, if a friend of hers murdered the whole block, Emily Ladenburg would be the first person at her friend's side!

Mrs. Orme Wilson is another woman who is the very essence of aristocracy. Yet in spite of it she is so delightful and unassuming! The first time I met her was at the opening of her new house on 64th Street, of which Stanford White was the architect. In those days professional people were not invited to the dinner table and while I was waiting upstairs, Mrs. Wilson came up and said:

"Would you mind spreading your songs through the evening instead of singing them all at once?"

"Why of course not," I replied.

She looked relieved and then murmured, "That is very gracious of you. Last week when I asked this favor of another artist, she said she would do it the way she always did, and I felt I would prefer not to have her at all."

I might as well confess a most amusing occurrence that happened during this evening. I had often heard of the beautiful gifts presented by wealthy men to stage favorites. Indeed, it has long been a custom in many lands, though in some the idea finds more poetical expression than in others. In Havana, for example, it is part of the evening's work to see white doves, fluttering from the rear of the house to the stage, bearing rubies and other precious stones about their feet for a favorite actress. Sometimes priceless gifts are concealed in little flower bouquets. Well, I had heard how certain well-known New Yorkers delighted to give valuable trinkets to those who chanced to be in the public eye. Knowing that Mr. John Jacob Astor was present and that he had just given a friend of mine a sable tippet after meeting her only once, I began preening myself and thinking up a pleasant greeting when we were introduced. "Ha-ha," I thought, "if he would do this for——, what won't he do for me!" When, therefore, Mrs. Wilson told me that her brother wished to meet me, I arranged my facial muscles at their most

Marie Dressler

"Merry Gambols"—an adventure in producing.

amiable angle and thought up a clever *bon mot* which would land the gentleman at my feet.

"Miss Dressler," said Mrs. Wilson, "I wish to present my brother, Mr. Astor." Ah, the great moment had arrived! I smiled, spoke, and expected to see him electrified. Whereupon, he scarcely nodded and deliberately turned his back —an event which showed me clearly that if I ever expected to have a limousine and "vermin" coats, they would be earned by blamed hard work on my part. I might add, however, that I did not see Mr. Astor for two years and then one day as I was coming from a play at the Casino, I became aware that Mr. Astor and his wife were walking down the steps near me. He gave no evidence of having seen me and remembering my one experience with him, I did not presume to speak to him. Suddenly he turned and said: "Miss Dressler, I want you to meet my wife," and then began a friendly chat which startled me even more than my previous meeting with him.

On the evening of my first appearance at Mrs. Wilson's, when I came in, I laid aside my fur

coat of Adirondack sable or ground hog—something of the kind—with the other elegant wraps. Harry Lehr, who now eats nothing but caviar and cream on toast, came up to me. "Say, Marie," he whispered, "that's an awful mangy coat you brought. When you leave this house, if you don't get out with a sable, I'll never speak to you again!"

Well, I didn't get the coat, but I did get some laughs, for I saw a marvelous bannister that appealed to me tremendously. "If I don't slide down that," I said, "I shall die. It's just like St. Moritz," and at that I slid down it—and Mrs. Orme Wilson is still speaking to me!

I have never understood the fearful awe suffered by many for those who chance to be better off. When one knows them they are much more human than elevator men or street cleaners —much! This is well illustrated by my first meeting with John Rockefeller, Jr. A mutual friend came up saying, "I should like to have you meet Mr. Rockefeller."

"Oh," I said, "don't bother him with me."

"But he wants to meet you," was the reply.

"Now look here," I said, "I can't talk religion and I won't talk money."

As the money lord approached, and I was wondering what sort of an opening I could use that would not be too flip, he held out his hand murmuring; "Who is there in the world who can do more with a hat than you can? Do you know I used to go sit in the gallery just to see you throw a banana you plucked from your hat at the orchestra leader?"

"Well," I said, "I often go to see you play golf, but at that I'm the best first hole driver in the world. I can hit a ball only when I have an audience, so my first drive is a wow. After that I go drink tea, for I know I can never hit another."

Our chat, if I remember, was interrupted by the well-known musical impresario, Maurice Bagby, of whose friendship I am very proud. I met him one time in Atlantic City, where I was rehearsing with a Shubert show which I later accompanied to the Winter Garden for fifteen weeks. Remembering my own chorus days, it has always been my custom, when I could, to

take some of the girls to lunch. I had a bunch of them with me one day when Bagby approached our table to know if he might sit with us. I was much amused, for he had dropped into an absolutely foreign atmosphere. He did not know how to talk Shubert and the girls did not know how to talk Bagby. Finally he made a great effort, and, turning to the girl at his side, said courteously, "Do you sing?"

She nodded warily.

"What do you sing?" he pursued, fancying, of course, she would say "Soprano" or "Contralto."

Imagine his horror when the truthful young person at his side, looked up at him with her lovely big eyes and began: " 'You May Be A Bad Man, But You Look Good To Me!' " At this Mr. Bagby threw up his hands crying, "Oh, my dear, my dear!" which was one time in my life I wished for a camera. I shall never forget the expression of his face.

I have always felt that it is more interesting to be able to move from one society shelf to another rather than to be confined to one class with no chance of mingling with others. So—one day

I discuss fleshings with chorus girls and the next Fascisti castor oil with presidents. I began going to the White House twenty-five years ago and know perfectly well where to find the ice box. Indeed, I was one of the few persons who ambled in and out during war times without a pass.

Cleveland was the first president I saw and after him I had conferences with McKinley and later, Roosevelt. My meeting with the latter has always been particularly vivid. I was sitting with several others waiting for President Roosevelt to enter, when, before I knew it, he had slipped in and was hurrying about with his well known, "De-lighted—de-lighted!" Paralyzed with interest, I kept my eyes on the strong neck that was being inclined here and there at different points in the room. He did everything so quickly and thoroughly and was through with it! I watched him with curiosity and amazement, and after a time he came up to me.

"Well, Miss Dressler," he smiled, "at last we meet. What do you think of me?"

"I think you have the most wonderful neck I ever saw," I said, and he laughed heartily.

"That beats any answer I've ever had," he admitted, pleased that I had told him my real thought.

So much has been said in praise of the fearlessness of this man that it is useless for me to reiterate his good points, but in passing I might add that he was most fortunate in his daughter, Alice. I have known her since she was a young girl and consider that she has grown into a most beautiful woman with the brains of her father. Despite the position she held, she was always gracious and considerate, and I feel that she is doing much in the world that is good.

Though I had met both Presidents Cleveland and McKinley before Mr. Roosevelt went into office, I do not recall their first greetings. My first words with President Taft, however, have remained with me because we were both slightly embarrassed.

"I have," I said, "the most comfortable feeling when you are in that chair. Everything seems so calm and sweet."

"I don't know how to take that," he replied, chuckling—a sound which is delightful and indescribable. It is as though he enjoyed a thing to the full and then finally pitied his hearer and let him in on it too. At any rate, that submerged laugh always fills me with thrills and bubbling mirth. There was always a bond of sympathy between Taft and myself on account of our size, and I always respected his bravery, for, fearing not the censorship of the world, he used to buy two seats for himself when he was attending an entertainment where he wished to be comfortable. I have often wondered how he felt on the night he reached the theater and found his two seats divided by an aisle.

Mr. Wilson seemed more serious than the other presidents I met, but I never knew him so well. I did, however, know the first Mrs. Wilson and her daughters. It was to Mrs. Wilson that I wrote one of my few poems to accompany some river pinks. These beautiful flowers grow on bushes and appear after a big spring rain. They last for weeks if rightly handled and are worthy of a Wordsworth or a Keats.

RIVER PINKS

I think we first saw her after the rain.
Yes, 'twas after the storm that our beauty came,
And we all stood still and wondered why
Such sweetness could come from that cruel sky.
For after its fury the woods all round
Lay crushed and broken, when it seemed like a bound
The sun lit suddenly on the ground
And uncovered her beauty without a sound.
The stream, the trees, and simple me
Caught that malady, love, and on bended knee,
Offered up our souls, but she only smiled—
God had given her beauty, but the brains of a child.
She never looked up, just straight ahead,
But on her sweetness a cruel snake fed,
But the brook said, "Ah, she couldn't think,
She was only a beautiful River Pink!"

Of all the presidents I have encountered during the twenty-five years I have been going to the White House, I think I most loved President Harding. There was a graciousness and sincerity about him which was altogether winning and he always gave the impression of thinking more than he spoke.

Once, when waiting with a throng to catch a glimpse of the President, Secretary Christian, spying me, came out and insisted on my following

him at once. I found myself ushered before President Harding who looked up with a smile.

"Mr. President," began his secretary, "I wish to introduce you to Miss——"

"Ah," interrupted the President, "you don't need to introduce me to Marie Dressler," and turning to me, he added with his rare tact, "I have seen you in everything you ever did. You used to come to Marion. The world is better for your having lived——" a pretty speech, of course, but it is not so much what is said as the way it is delivered that makes an impression on life's stage as well as the other, and I cannot forget these lines any more than I can those used in reply to the question which trembled to my lips.

"Surely," I said, "you are not going to shake hands before lunch time with that queue of two hundred out there?"

"Yes," he returned, "none of them wants anything. They just want to shake my hand."

And the people did just want to shake his hand, for when he could no longer do so, I was in London. With many others I hurried to

Westminster Abbey and knelt on the floor listening to the fervent eulogy of the Bishop. When he finally said: "There is a man who died for his country," every American there was weeping unashamed.

To me the great wonder is that any president ever gets out of office with a shred of reputation left for, the higher the position, the more eager the mob is to destroy it. A man will start a little store, go without meals, deny himself pleasures, work early and late to build up his business, and when, through actual self denial and toil, he achieves success, he is envied by his employes and neighbors as being "lucky" and they are eager to defame him in any possible way.

Politician, professional man, artist—it is all the same—for no matter how conscientiously they may try, as soon as they are known and liked, there is always a blackmailing type which sets to work to smirch any reputation which may have been honestly and laboriously acquired. Any bum can start a false report—that is simple and perhaps understandable, because so many are mentally unbalanced, but what I have never been

During the War.

able to understand is the avidity with which the populace in general eagerly believes any malicious tale that is spread.

When subpoenas began coming my way, I knew I had arrived. Success and favorable publicity to certain minds connote wealth. As a matter of fact, funds seldom keep pace with one's popularity and one is often harder up with a job and a million friends than the man who has no job and no friends, despite the adage that he who has friends is wealthy.

One of my first experiences with process servers was during my engagement with *The Tar and the Tartar*. When I joined the company in Ohio the rôle which was handed me to learn included a poem which I naturally assumed to be part of the book. The poem was tragic in tone and every few lines there were dashes where incidental music came in, and it was the music which made the words funny. I tore up the place with that recitation. We were playing near New York when I was approached one day by the most terrible looking man who asked if I was "Marie Dressler" and when I said I was,

he thrust a paper into my hand. "Isn't that funny—wonder what this is?" I said innocently to the friend who was with me. I looked and was amazed to see that it was a summons to court. Such a time as I had! I kept repeating, "What have I done? What have I done?" In spite of a clear conscience and the protests of my friends, I rushed to Jersey and hid, never putting my nose out of my hiding place, until one of the girls came over and informed me that I didn't have to go to jail after all. "You'll have a chance to explain it," she said comfortingly. "But what have I done?" I demanded. Then I learned that the crime for which I had been in hiding was for reciting that poem. It was claimed as personal property by Madame Mathilde Cottrelly, who preceded me in the rôle, and she had brought the suit, claiming it was being used without her permission. I had naturally assumed the poem to be part of the play. She lost the case, but it was none the less annoying to me at the time.

My next experience of this sort was when I was engaged by another company in which two

managers were interested. "Marie," said they, "you know who makes costumes to suit you—get what you want and send the bill to us." That was fine, I thought, because I was glad to give the work to a friend and in my delight at doing a good turn for the costumer, I forgot to make the managers give me a signed order. Well, the costumes were made. In two weeks I was boosted out of the show, which kept on the road, played the entire season and my successor used my costumes. The managers refused to pay the costumer for them and the man sued me, and I had to make good for them. I suppose when people read about Marie Dressler trying to beat a man out of his bill for ordered costumes, they raised their eyebrows. The flavor of incidents like that remains when the facts are forgotten.

A similar episode occurred to me after *Tillie's Nightmare* had passed out of my hands and I had gone to work in something else. The man who put on the play made a fizzle of it and I was sued for his bills, although I was in no way connected with the production. All of which shows

that everything in the world is an object lesson—for somebody else.

There are so many wheels within wheels to some of these things that theatrical people get blamed for many things they never do. When a player is supposed to have success and a little money, this is the predicament he is up against much of the time. All sorts of persons prey on professionals—they are in the limelight—their lives are by necessity unsettled, and they are easy targets for the unscrupulous. That is why they so often go into bankruptcy. They are frequently accused of owing bills they never contracted, gross overcharges, etc., and bankruptcy is simpler than going to court and paying lawyer's fees to prove that some outrageous amount is not owed. Actors cannot afford the time away from their work to drag through a long suit.

The side of the picture that many people do not know is that when some do resort to bankruptcy to avoid a bill they do not owe, they often pay up legitimate bills afterward to the last cent. I do not mean to state that all bankruptcies are

of the nature of honest protection, but there are a surprising number of this type.

I gathered from my own experience that the law seems to be made for thieves. If one is on the level and some rotter discovers he can blackmail, the law helps him because things are so arranged that it is cheaper to pay the price than to give the time and money to fight the cases. Then come the lawyers' fees. Now I know lawyers must live, but I've never been able to understand why they have to live so blamed well!

VI

The Ugly Duckling Seeks New Ponds and Puddles

I FIRMLY believe that America is the greatest country in the world and subscribe heartily to the slogan, "America first," but, nevertheless, I am an ardent advocate of travel and its value. I never realized, until I had an opportunity to get in touch with older countries, how necessary it is to know them if one is to give anything to the world. One may have really big thoughts while feeding chickens in Texas or paring potatoes in Maine, but it is the exceptional person who can pass these thoughts on, unless he has been broadened by many contacts and a perfect understanding of men, places, and events.

For a great many years the care of my family made impossible my desire to see how others lived. As soon, however, as I was freed of my obligations, I went to the spots of which I had always dreamed, and was surprised at the different vision I soon acquired. It was not only that I enjoyed being in and seeing the historic places of the world, but, somehow, they helped me to grow and unfold in a curious and inexplicable manner. I know, for instance, that if I were to play any of my old parts now, I would do them in an entirely new way. My idea might be the same, but I should put it over from a different point of view.

Perhaps part of my enjoyment of going to foreign places is due to the fact that I am naturally a good traveler and people I meet are always so kind to me. I have been across eight or ten times and I always go without plan and let events direct me. In this way I am not tied to schedules and do not, like some people, miss everything except the train.

I will never forget my first ocean experience.

A friend (now Mrs. John Golden) and I picked out the *Minneapolis,* Captain Gates, which sailed direct to London. We had a room with two bunks and went down to the boat with our heads in the air, arrogant and proud as two Mexican bantams. As soon as we were aboard we strutted to our cabin and found it empty.

"Where is our luggage?" I demanded of a passing stewardess.

"Madame," she replied, "you have been moved."

Well, I was furious instantly. I had reached a place where I thought I was not to be tampered with. "I've been moved," I said. "I *am* surprised!" I do not remember now, but I suspect my thoughts, if not my language, were possibly quite as picturesque as my father's.

After allowing me to expend my wrath, the stewardess said mildly, "I think you won't complain, Madame. Won't you come see your quarters?"

But I was not content. In high dudgeon I went to the purser. "My room's been changed," I announced.

When "Equity" was on strike.

"Madame," said the purser, "Mr. Franklin so ordered it."

"I don't know who Mr. Franklin is," I said, not knowing he was the whole darn thing, "but he certainly has his nerve."

"Knowing this to be your maiden voyage," continued the purser, "Mr. Franklin has placed the bridal suite at the disposal of yourself and your friend." Imagine! And I'd been raising the roof about an act that was good enough for me to put gravy on and eat! This was the first courtesy the White Star Line showed me, but they have always been more than thoughtful in every way and of course I learned that "Mr. Franklin" was a name to conjure with.

After docking we explored London and then went to Paris. There we met one of the ardent admirers of Bonnie Magin. He gave her marvelous parties, and May Golden and I used to get in on them as chaperones. One day he told us that he had hired a four-in-hand for a trip to Versailles and we were all agog with excitement and expectancy. We trotted forth gaily in the bright sunshine, and finally, with much whip

cracking and quite a to-do, pulled up in Versailles alongside of a little old fruit vendor whose stand was near DuBarry's house. Her apples looked like "prop" fruit and she was as gnarled and old as a small tree trunk. Now our rich American friend had engaged an orchestra of five pieces to serenade us when we stopped, and the musicians had no sooner started than an eruption of gendarmes occured. They seemed to come out of the earth, out of the air, the trees! It developed that a permit was necessary for such an unusual proceeding and this legality had been overlooked. The gendarmes gesticulated, the musicians gesticulated, we gesticulated and the little old apple woman was most violent of all. Incensed that our host's pleasure should have been spoiled so needlessly, I called the old apple woman everything I could think of and insisted that she was at the bottom of all the trouble. Later I discovered she had been taking our part most vehemently, which proved to me early that a foreign language is a most treacherous thing, for sometimes it is impossible to tell

whether the speaker is mad or glad, and it is really quite an important thing to know.

It was on this trip that I first made the acquaintance of Old Marguery and "Duck" Frederick in Paris, those famous artists of the palate. The former was perhaps the greatest chef of fish the world has ever seen, and everyone knows the well-known sauce which bears his name. Frederick's, or the *Tour d' Argent,* is one of the oldest restaurants in Paris, dating from 1480, and has always specialized in duck. The preparation of this delightful bird is performed in the presence of the diners and is surrounded by the pomp and ceremony of a religious rite. Each duck is numbered and while the patron may not remember whether it was the millionth or millionth-and-eighty-second duck upon which he dined, he will never forget the duck—or the price. Both of these great chefs measured a yard across the front and no doubt helped me to my own avoirdupois.

There is an atmosphere about such places as Marguery's and Frederick's which exalts cooking as an art. I know of no such places in America,

although certain hotels stand out in my mind for certain specialties. I am not what might be called "fussy" about food, but in traveling about on the road one meets many culinary adventures. John Chamberlain of Washington, who also built the Chamberlain at Old Point Comfort, was the greatest epicure we have had in this country, I think. His place in Washington has become history, and a hundred amusing tales might be told of the romance and intrigues which happened there. After the show we congregated at his place for suppers and Mr. Chamberlain would get up parties for me. He always told me that he hoped he would die with his boots on and he did—for when he was actually expiring he made the nurses sit him up and dress him. When a man of this sort goes, it seems as if the atmosphere and neighborhood dies, too.

How good old hotels along the route linger in pleasant memory! The Planters in St. Louis was such a one—and the splendid, hospitable proprietor who welcomed us with flowers and always had a supper spread out in our honor at night after the show. Then there was the

Cadillac in Detroit, while in Boston there was the Adams House, with its famous Corner Club, as the Mason Street side was called, where all the elect of Boston met. George Hall and his son George, Jr., the proprietors, were known and loved by all the profession.

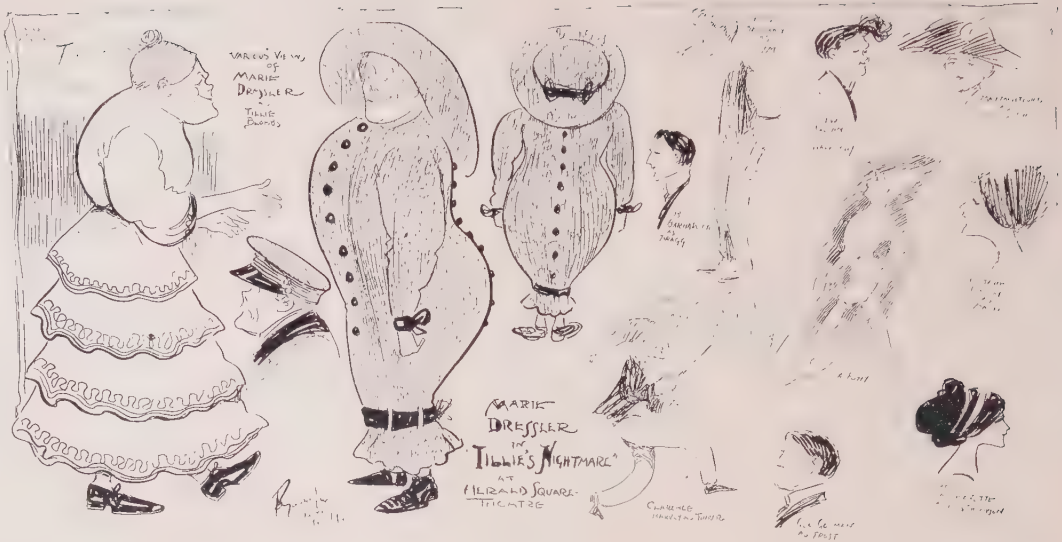
Other famous hosts, to whom I owe many kindnesses, were old Mr. Zimmerman, owner of the St. Nicholas in Cincinnati, Tilly Haynes of the Broadway, Stafford and Whittaker of the Imperial and the Netherlands in New York, and Frank Wiggins, manager of the Vanderbilt and President of the Hotel Men's Association, whom I remember as a dear boy—he was a nephew of Stafford's.

Among the pleasant institutions which seem to be passing, I can think of none more to be regretted than the old fashioned type of hotel "landlord," who made one feel when one registered that one had Come Home! For years this has been lost to us. I now find this same atmosphere at the Waldorf and that my old friend, Roy Carruthers, has brought it back. After making such a success of the Old Cliff

House, Mr. Carruthers next managed the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, from which he came to the Pennsylvania and from there took over the Waldorf-Astoria. Of course the name of this hotel is synonymous with that of another good friend of mine, the famous Oscar Tschirky. We need more of these "old school" hotel men, who keep their finger in the pie, whose personality is felt throughout every part of the establishment, who know their business, their patrons, and who love their jobs.

Even at the risk of being put in a class with the two old men, one of whom mourned that "things ain't like they used to be" and the other who even more mournfully echoed "and they never was!" I cannot resist recalling the hotel carpets of other days. Yes, even the cabbage roses of yesteryear! Cheerful things, gorgeous in color and with a pile as thick and soft as mush. People can talk about bare floors with little slivers of rugs about the size, design and color of foreign postage stamps—but give me the sole-satisfying luxury of those wonderful old carpets.

However, despite the luxuriousness of hotels


VARIOUS VIEWS OF MARIE DRESSLER IN TILLIE BLOOD'S
MARIE DRESSLER IN TILLIE'S NIGHTMARE AT HERALD SQUARE THEATRE

I have enjoyed and the freedom of the homes of my fortunate friends, I must admit that when I want a real gastronomic thrill I seek the nearest White-tile-Pancake-Palace, and order country sausage, pancakes and butter cakes. Besides the food, I enjoy the informality of the place. One either has to sit down at a table with someone else—or someone else does it at your table if you are there first. It is extremely inspiring to me to have a sweet old lady suddenly look up shyly from her pancakes and say: "Miss Dressler—I can't resist speaking to you—but my son took me to see you in *Tillie's Nightmare*—and how I did laugh—I hope you don't mind my speaking, but I knew you the minute you sat down——" or to have a business girl I have never seen pause suddenly at my table to say; "Miss Dressler—I see you are going abroad again. I hope you have a wonderful time. You've earned it and deserve it. I just had to say so!"

It may sound like handing myself bouquets—and I realize that no flowers wither so quickly as those bouquets we hand ourselves—but these

things have meant so much to me in my life—the kindness and friendship extended to me by strangers—yet not strangers, for somewhere, sometime, perhaps for a moment, I went across the footlights to them when they needed a laugh—and a laugh made us friends. Little messages of appreciation and good will which come to me every day when I'm shopping, on the street, in restaurants, trains and on shipboard always bring the tears to my eyes, and, over and over, I say to myself, "What have I done to deserve this love?" My only answer is that I have always tried to think of others first and that's maybe why in the end they think of me. At any rate, I am grateful for my friends and glad that, no matter what part of the world my travels take me, I am sure to find someone who will come up to me and say, "Aren't you Marie Dressler?"

Of course, I do not pretend to know all there is to know about travel, but I have been at it long enough to be able to state emphatically that it is impossible to get Epsom Salts in Epsom; there are no Venetian blinds in Venice; no Ham-

burg steak in Hamburg; no chop suey in China; no English breakfast tea in England; no Italian silk underwear in Italy. When I began snooping I found that everything "imported" seemed to be made in Hoboken. Now when I go to Jersey, I feel that I have to have my passport viséd. Hoboken is certainly our foreign importation port!

I also discovered, in common with many of my brothers and sisters who have preceded me, that more and cheaper oranges can be bought in New York than in a picturesque Florida or California grove; that a cocoanut procurable from Harlem to the Bowery for from two to ten cents, costs fifty cents in Miami where all one has to do is to knock it off the tree.

While I have not always found in a country what I have expected there, I have invariably discovered something else, for I never pass anything by. Some of my most cherished memories are those which have come through my pausing to make inquiries when there was something going on around me that I did not understand. Many of us are too proud or too cowardly to

ask questions and they miss a great deal. For example, while walking one day with a friend in Riva, a charming little town tucked in at the upper end of Lake Garda, we observed, in the old square, a little open chapel, draped for a funeral. At first I supposed it was some particular day of mourning, but instead of hurrying by, I kept looking and speculating, until I suddenly saw, where the heavy curtains were parted, an oak coffin covered with the American flag! Of course the sight electrified us, for no matter what one may say about taxes and politics and prohibition while in the States, the minute that flag is displayed abroad it fills one with tears and pride and inward huzzas!

Unable to pass on, we approached reverently and found on the wall of the chapel a photograph framed in heavy oak. It was the enlargement of a kodak snapshot of a boy and his dog—a smiling Italian boy in an American uniform sitting in the trenches. We knew he was a nice boy because the collie beside him was looking straight into his face, with love and worship in his eyes. An announcement was pasted beside the picture

and from it we learned that the funeral was for Alessandro Lonardi, aged nineteen years, a volunteer in the American army, killed in France in 1918.

The parents had wished to have the body buried with them, and so, four years later, what was left of their son was sent to this little village, with the coffin draped in a beautiful American flag. On the table beside the coffin lay a silver tray for the cards of friends. Various town organizations had sent wreaths bearing streamers of the Italian colors. America had presented the flag, but, somehow, I felt the mother and father should have a tribute more personal. My friend and I hurried to a florist who made up a tremendous wreath of flowers in the American colors, with a huge streamer of red, white and blue, on which were the words (or so we were told), "Homage from Two American Women."

When the mother and sisters came, their heads covered with black lace, our wreath was taken off the coffin where it had been set and showed to them, and we knew then we had done the right thing.

Following the hearse, with its plume-decorated horses, walked four priests and altar boys bearing incense. After them appeared a Boy Scout, carrying the offering of the American women. Then marched the military, Boy Scouts and Marine Scouts, some sodalities, and, last of all, the Fascisti with their black shirts and wild bushy hair. It was all a thrilling and inspiring sight. Because we had dared to pause, we became a part of it, and now I cannot forget either the pictured face of that brave boy who died for America or the Fascisti youths with their eyes lighted by a wild desire to save Italy.

While some folks regard this organization as a body of crazy fanatics, I believe with many more that they are earnest in their wish to serve their country. Italy is coming back faster than any other country in Europe and I believe the Fascisti are the best thing that ever happened.

Perhaps my feeling of personal interest in them is somewhat colored by a little incident which happened one evening, as Ethel Levey and myself left a Venetian Palazzo where we had been entertained. We decided to walk, as the

This is how sad I look when I sail for Italy and when I arrive home!

evening was fine and we wanted a bit of air. As we started over San Marco, we noticed there were two dapper Fascisti following us, and for the first time we remembered our evening clothes and jewelry.

"Fresh Italians," said Ethel, "they are going to speak to us."

As we reached a very dark, narrow lane, one of the youths dropped behind and the other approached rapidly. By that time we had begun to feel a trifle nervous, but the feeling of fright was dispelled when the young man said in English: "I'll take you to the hotel. It is dark and it is two ladies alone. We Fascisti like to protect ladies. You must not go with all this jewelry with no protection. We have not yet cleared out Italy as it will be cleared out."

The earnestness of the lad left us with rather pleasant thoughts that gallantry is not dying after all, and we felt more fond of Italy than ever, if such a thing were possible. Indeed, of all the lands I have visited, I best love Italy and I hope some day I may own a front and back yard there, with just enough money to help any

who come along. I've enough to buy the back yard, but I haven't saved up enough to help, and when one loves one wants to help—just as the Fascisti, who have drowned all thoughts of graft in an unselfish love thought—a thought which in one year brought marvelous results and will remake the country.

Some of my feeling about this age-old and fascinating land is contained in a little poem I wrote near the inspiriting and towering trees on Laga di Garda:

If your World goes wrong,
Or your Heart is clogged;
If you're tired of Life,
Or your Soul seems flogged,
Go to Sunny Italy, and
Take a drop from the blue in the "Heavens"
Take a drop from the Waters that run,
Take a breath from the hearts of the people
That bask 'neath that glorious Sun.
Take as much of their simple feeling
As you can crush into the bowl
And hold it tightly enfolded
As close as you can to your Soul:
And then just before mixing,
I pray you to ponder and *think*
That there's not a thing in it could hurt you
So fill up your glasses and drink
To——ITALY——*Io t'amo ITALY.*

My heart was really quite full when I composed this and I believed it, but I never was more touched than when, upon returning to America, my friend, Miss Bertha Maser, for years housekeeper at the Astor, came to me one day with the information that her sister's Italian vegetable man in Harlem had heard of my eulogy of Italy and wanted it. An incident which shows again that one never seems to get away from one's slightest action—good or bad it does not belong to one alone, but reaches out and touches others for better or worse.

I have often been asked what portion of the land of Garibaldi and Benvenuto Cellini I like best, and I find the answer difficult. Laga di Garda and Lake Como I love for their beauty and calm. Venice is dear to me for its romantic charm and because I have always had many friends there. Verona appeals to me because of its marvelous open air opera, where 35,000 sit in the arena and 150 in the orchestra, with God's sky and the stars above. I love Naples because, aside from its beauty, it lands me in Italy!

As for Rome—I just lined up with all the other ruins and held my own! It is not only fascinating because it is historically impressive, but also because of the Coliseum, which draws and holds me as nothing I have ever known. Again and again I have gone there by sunlight and by moonlight. Big things have always appealed to me. I never pass a huge manufacturing plant without longing to be part of it. An imposing front draws me like a magnet. I like plenty of area about me, and this is perhaps one reason why I find the Coliseum so satisfying. Others seek it as well as I, for there are always lovers in the shadowy recesses and usually there is a violinist or a flutist, hidden away so high up in the towering ruins that one can't tell where the sound is coming from, as he pours out his soul to the audience that has been asleep for centuries. When this happens the whole city of Rome seems hushed. I think I like the Coliseum, too, because, as I once told Adolph Ochs and his wife, when we were standing looking at it together in the moonlight, it is practically the

only thing I have ever seen which seemed incapable of being moved and commercialized—a rare feature in these hectic, money-crazed days. Perhaps that is why Italy makes such a strong appeal to me. The people live from day to day as I do, without worrying greatly about storing up gold for the morrow.

There is a certain simple faith and directness about the home-made, attached-to-the-soil Italians, which is very captivating. Even the little children in the streets carve marble figurines of our Savior, and if one speaks to them, they strive so valiantly to understand! When one enters a shop where they do not carry the article desired, one is directed to a rival shop—a habit that leaves a far happier impression than our American insistence, "We haven't any toothbrushes, but you'd better take some of our AX tooth powder. You'll regret it if you don't buy today."

After I have been to a spot often enough so that it has, in a sense, become part of me, I always derive considerable amusement and en-

lightenment from the tourists who pause nearby. Once, for instance, when I was standing in front of the Doges' Palace, weaving stories about the past, a voice behind me said; "Call that architecture! It ain't no such thing. Lions don't have wings." It is curious, too, to note the superstition about walking between the columns in San Marco's Square—people will not do it.

One of the most amusing things that ever happened to me in Italy was at the baths of Caracalla. I had gone to this lovely spot with our Ambassador, Richard Washburn Child, and, as we were strolling around, I expressed a wish to go through some gates which were locked. We made known our request to an attendant, but he shook his head and insisted that it was not permitted. Noting my disappointment, Mr. Child explained who he was and the attendant bowed to a dignitary of our great country and acceded to our wishes. The gates were opened. We strolled out in the old hanging gardens. Moss covered ruins rose around us, swallows swooped in and out of the holes, little flowers blossomed on the decayed banks at our sides,

and the wild grass grew rankly about our feet. When we were tired of defying the past, we wandered back and found the attendant.

"Why," asked Mr. Child, "do they try to keep people out of that nice, restful spot yonder?"

"Because," replied the attendant respectfully, "we are expecting it to cave in at any moment."

Having left Mrs. Child at home, all I could see was the headline in New York papers—"Out of the ruins were dragged the American Ambassador and Marie Dressler, the actress."

I find in Italy all that wonderful artistry that I never thought I'd get a chance to enjoy; things I have been starved for all my life. Yet I don't try to "do" all the galleries, all the museums on the Marathon plan, just that I may be able to say I have seen them all. I like to browse around and find just the sort of things in pictures and sculpture which appeal to me and then it pleases me to go back to the same ones again and again. I have a squatter's claim on a spot in Verona—I go there so often to get my favorite view of Dante's statue. I've been to Verona eight times just to stand in front of it.

Because I prefer things in their own atmosphere, perhaps that is why I never return home from Italy with my arms full of Venetian bureaux, cassones, cadenzas, barcaroles, refectory tables, prie dieus and whatnots. I have been entertained in the palazzos of the greatest families in Italy—such glorious places, where one couldn't count the reception rooms—and I have noticed chairs roped off against the walls. Not being known as a collector of antiques, this puzzled me, until I decided that my hosts did not suspect me of any designs, such as stealing them or trying to buy them, but knowing I was going to be present they no doubt thought that I couldn't resist going through a chair or doing a backward tip and feared that I'd leave all their heirlooms in ruins!

It would never do for me to go in for period furniture in my own home. I always adjust myself to my setting and if I had to get into a Marie Antoinette mood every time I went into my Louis the 14th Street drawing-room it would get on my nerves.

Many people who go in for antiques soon have

their places looking like a shop, and I never have been in one of these homes yet but I have an almost uncontrollable desire to say to the master or mistress, "How much do you want for this—how much for that?" not because I want the objects but because the shop atmosphere instead of the home atmosphere predominates. Speaking of homes, I find the English homes adorable—they know how to adapt and make houses and furnishings livable.

Perhaps I am a little unsympathetic with collectors because I never had time for fads—it's a game one has to learn, I suppose, like everything else. I have always been so darned glad to get the little I had in the way of necessities that I never had time or money to fad. The only things I ever collected in my life were bangles. That craze was one that hit me, I must admit. All the other girls had these jingling bracelets—as I remember it, each bangle was supposed to represent a sentimental souvenir. So you see, everyone just had to have some even if she bought 'em herself. How I got mine I have forgotten, but I know when I came along

it sounded as if the bell cow had broken out of the pasture.

I never could see the sense in owning large quantities of jewelry and keeping it in a safe deposit box or leaving it around in hotels and in taxicabs, or of having closets filled with clothes one never wears. I knew a very wealthy woman in Toronto who owned hundreds and hundreds of dresses—everything she had bought years and years back. One day she was showing them to me and I very frankly told her my opinion of hoarding such things. Heaven knows I didn't want any of them—they wouldn't fit me.

An Italian experience which remains quite vividly in my mind is connected with Venice. Lady Colbrook, with whom I was staying, insisted that I should have my portrait painted by Toreltino, a very unusual man and an excellent artist. He had asked me to sit for him several times, but I had made excuses until my hostess finally took matters in her own hands and arranged some appointments.

The artist began to paint. After a time, he stopped and threw down his brushes. "I can

"HEAVEN WILL PROTECT THE WORKING GIRL"
SKETCHED AT THE HEILIG
WALKER O'LOUGHLIN

go no further," he said, a sound of dismay in his voice.

We insisted on seeing the canvas, and there, looking back at me, was not the image of myself but a perfect likeness of my father. At a later sitting almost the same thing occurred. The artist stopped, saying, "It is all wrong," and, when we looked, I discovered it was my sister's face this time. Now Toreltino, of course, did not know my family at all and he could not conceive what the matter could be. I finally explained to him a curious faculty I possess of resembling the person of whom I happen to be thinking. No two of my photographs ever look alike and if my thoughts are dwelling on Theda Bara, my likeness will resemble her. I can't explain this except that I have a telegraph mind which gets everything in picture form, and I suppose my face reflects my thoughts.

I have three natures and the most dominant one of these is very serious and sad. This I presume will be a shock to many who regard me as a rollicking, boisterous comedienne, but is not

out of line with the known facts regarding many fictional humorists and the already accepted fact that real comedy is after all allied to pathos. A laugh without a tear under it is nothing but a shell.

When I journey about now, resting under smiling skies, strolling with the fashionable throngs at Monte Carlo, eating rare foods with kingly names which years ago were unknown to me, I often think of those early days when I thought I was traveling when our tours took us farther north or farther south than we had expected to go. I will never forget one of these trips in my early opera days.

We had landed in a little southern town and were absolutely famished. Moreover, we had been penned up in the cars so long that we were like exuberant puppies turned out after weeks on the leash. As we ambled down the track in confusion, I spied a lunch cart and began running.

"Hi, Indians, come on!" I called back to the girls behind me. Putting our hands over our

mouths to make the well-known Indian war whoop, we raced pell-mell and yelling toward the lunch cart. I discovered afterward that the boy who ran the cart was half witted, but of course we did not know it as we bore down on him in the midst of our high spirits. As he saw us coming, he gave one shriek of terror, jumped from the window and fled. As a result, I had to run the lunch cart and take in the money till somebody had hunted up the shocked lad and helped him back to his half wits.

It was on this same trip that we reached a town where an Uncle Tom's Cabin show was playing. We were strolling down the tracks again, when Renée Rogers looked over her shoulder and saw the huge dogs from the show being exercised. She was terrified and began to run. A woman running was the dogs' cue in the show and they tore after her. The rest of the crowd began running, too, some to stop the dogs and some to get away from them. Here and there, someone stumbled and fell; everybody was hot, hysterical and shouting. When we finally reached

poor Renée, the dogs had overtaken her, and she had sunk to the ground, weeping wildly, while the dogs stood by trying to lick the tears from her eyes.

A great jump from the Doges' Palace to southern railroad tracks or vice versa. Yet even this early travel, such as it was, helped to give me sympathies and understanding. Without it I would not know people half so well, and, if I did not know them, I could never make them laugh and cry. I learned early that the psychology of individuals is very valuable. Without it I would do as many others, pass by the bashful or silent who are often very worthwhile, but who crouch behind a stone wall of reserve which they themselves have erected. I always go to work to kick down the wall and get acquainted with these poor mental masons.

I try to teach these people what I myself have learned, viz, that when I am blue or downhearted, the best medicine in the world is to find someone in a worse condition than I am and do something for him—just to listen to his tale sometimes helps

and if one can remember a funny story to tell to replace the sad one—that helps, too.

Amusing stories are a great boon. Indeed, I hope that when they are carrying me on my travels to my last resting place I shall be able to remember a good one.

VII

The Ugly Duckling Is a Swan for Romance

THERE are very few persons who would think of inquiring into the private life of the newspaper dealer at the corner, or the druggist, or the doctor, or even a Mah Jong partner, but the moment one belongs to the theatrical profession, the public usually feels cheated unless it knows one's inmost thoughts of love. Mine, without moralizing, can be set down in a nut shell. I believe that God is love; that love makes life; keeps life going; heals all worries and cures all ills.

So far as more detailed information is concerned, I have had a couple of marriages, but like every other woman I had a perfect right to them. I went through what every woman has gone through and am still living. I think it is quite safe to say I shan't do it again, although I have known several persons who seemed to derive comfort and satisfaction from a number of mates. I have been acquainted with De Wolf Hopper's complete set of wives, for instance, and they were all fine women that filled me with respect for Mr. Hopper's choices. To be quite frank, men do not interest me now unless they are under twenty-six. The subject of my marriages has been so written up that there is, indeed, nothing left for me to say.

The times I have been in love is a different matter. That has been a chronic disease with me. I'm never out of love, never expect to be, and never want to be. Ah, how often I have planted my feet in the tracks of Romeo and looked up at the balcony of Juliet—far too small for any woman to occupy—and reached by a wall so high and smooth that nobody but Doug-

las Fairbanks could possibly make the trip, yet —even so—I refuse to toss away my illusions about love! I have always understood men and they always seem to understand me. The first requisite of a man who would interest me is that he must be entertaining or I can't be bothered with him. In order to point out what I consider ideal traits, I should like to give the names of ———————— and ———————— but perhaps I had better not. The former is a very fine judge and the latter has a name that sounds like a biscuit. While humor is absolutely essential, of course, I enjoy a companion who can dance and who likes sports, for I love a good game of anything from Mah Jong to baseball. Men have nearly always, with the exception of a few during my early stage career, been exceptionally kind to me, from those who ran the ferries in the period when I went to Long Island to newer acquaintances who may be found at the Ritz.

I think one reason I have been so fortunate is because I look for kindness and expect kindness, and I get it. I have never undervalued friendship and I almost never lose a friend once made.

Someone has said that friendship is a flower which requires careful watering and cultivation in order to survive. If such is the case, I will travel around the world on my knees carrying a watering pot rather than see a friendship wither. I seldom forget a face and people seldom forget mine. Perhaps the greatest tribute I can record in this connection was given me by Lockhart's elephants. They were so fond of me that Lockhart offered me one thousand dollars per week to appear with them, and though I did not accept his proposition, I often took part on bills with him. The elephants got so they would not work if I stood in the wings, as they thought, no doubt, "Let the strongest do it." Finally, Lockhart was obliged to ask me to keep out of sight. One night, however, he said, "Go on and see if they will work for you."

Consequently, I romped on and the whole bunch wanted to play. Four years later when I was appearing in Bridgeport, Mrs. Lockhart asked me if I would like to visit the elephants. Of course I wanted to go.

"Don't speak when we get there," she said. "Just go down and stand."

I did as she suggested. Suddenly one of the big beasts began trumpeting and then they all ran toward me—a doubtful welcome in the minds of those who don't understand elephants, perhaps, but I was inordinately touched and quite vain about it. Seven years from that time I went to the Chicago Coliseum to see Ringling's circus and, of course, I went to call on the elephants. Imagine my surprise to be greeted by a mighty trumpeting! Then I discovered, what I had not known before, that Lockhart had died and his elephants had become the property of Ringling. Just imagine being remembered seven years by anybody or anything! I'll say this was a real manifestation that my friends don't forget me, and the joy in their love is happiness indeed.

Next to my work, my travels, and my friends, two poems have had the greatest influence on my life. The first one is by Louise Knight Wheatley and reads in part:

MARIE DRESSLER AS TILLIE.
THE LARGEST PART OF A BIG SHOW.

—and the piano, also

"Teach me to love not those who first love me
But all the world, with that rare purity,
With that true ecstacy of broad outreaching thought
Which bears no earthly taint
But holds in its embrace—humanity!"

The second are the old familiar lines of Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

"Laugh and the world laughs with you,
Weep, and you weep alone,
For this grand old earth must borrow its mirth—
It has troubles enough of its own."

It is a curious fact that I never experience difficulty in remembering material if I like it. Otherwise, I cannot keep it in my head. I used to be exceedingly adept at lines. Indeed, I could read a poem once and know it. But at no period of my life have I ever been able to remember a name or title. I cannot always remember my own. As an illustration of this, I might mention an incident occurring in a dry-goods store, where I used to purchase little articles and where I was known to all the sales force. One day I bought some trinket and said, "Send it up C. O. D."

I did not give the girl my name, because it had

never been necessary, but the clerk was evidently new, for she turned to me asking, "What name, please?"

Inarticulate, I stood there, and to save my life I didn't know what my name was!

I was unspeakably grateful when another girl called across in a shocked voice, "Why, Lily Beal, don't you know that's Marie Dressler?"

Well, it was more than I knew, but I made up my mind to try to memorize it, and not make a spectacle of myself again. I do not care what I do on the stage, but I endeavor to be as inconspicuous as possible when I am away from it. I try to keep out of trouble, but if it comes my way, I never dodge it. In working I always live what the other fellow is saying—just as I try to put myself in the other fellow's place in real life. My stage methods change according to the size of the theater. In large places I put on the comedy with a large brush. In small halls I etch it, and I am always amused at the surprise shown at my drawing-room singing which is more intimate. In rehearsing, I try not to annoy the director and I have never fought with a manager

for personal ends. Few of the laity know the value of a good musical director to a musical show. I have been acquainted with many of these men of whom one of the best was Maurice Levy of Weber and Fields' fame, now working in a jewelry store in Baltimore. He was quite exceptional because he kept the orchestra down instead of allowing it to overpower the singer, as many present day leaders cannot resist doing.

Stromberg, composer of "My Evening Star, I Wonder Where You Are" and "Rosy, You Are My Posy" was also exceptional. I have already mentioned Gustav Kerker, but cannot pause without bringing to mind Frank Sadler, one of the best arrangers of music ever known. He made the sense of the song a part of himself and every instrument lived part of that lyric. The public always looked for his orchestrations and recognized a great void when he worked himself to death.

Herman Fink, in England, is another excellent arranger and leader. His men are absolutely one with him and it is marvelous to watch him. These men, the scene designers, scene

shifters, electricians and others who join forces to make a show successful are often forgotten in the general appreciation of the ensemble of lights, costumes, pretty girls, acting, and music, but their importance cannot be discounted, any more than a good manager can be overestimated. In this field we have not enough men like Percy G. Williams who loved and was loved by the profession. He never forgot that actors made him and his kind and gracious personality has furnished pleasant thoughts for many players throughout many years. The public seldom realizes, too, that without managers with the nerve to take a chance, there would be no shows.

Goodness knows I am not one to live in the past. Yesterdays are only interesting as a background for today and for tomorrow, and yet the past keeps coming forward with a halo of pleasant memories until we begin to endow it with reverence and respect. In the case of the theater I think we can look upon the past with veneration, for its history is magnificent.

In my opinion the highly organized efficiency

of the modern theater may be the one thing that is the matter with it. In the specialization and perfection of organization something has been lost. This something, I feel, the public regrets. Perhaps the little theater movements springing up over the country may bring back this enjoyed flavor. I think so, not alone because I want to think so, but from a number of reliable signs, that point the way to a return.

A reflection upon the times when I went on the stage aids in reaching this conclusion. There were then more than six hundred theaters in this country giving performances regularly through the season. There are now less than two hundred cities and towns where stage performances are a part of the life and living of the community. The movies have invaded the field, of course, and have given great enjoyment to many people, and yet there is a hunger for dramatic offerings in many localities, which may be satisfied with commercial profit, just as these many places splendidly supported play-houses in the not so distant past.

The theater, as an edifice, has not failed, for

there are buildings still standing in this country which have not housed a production in years. Theaters would be built speedily if enterprise was exhibited. There are hundreds of moving-picture palaces over the country, neighborhood houses, finer plants than the old time regular stage ever knew. The theater has suffered most through loss of managers.

Time was when several hundred managers made important productions and toured the country. Of course there were failures, when companies were stranded and when embarrassments of every kind were met in bringing them back to New York. That was a part of the game, but in those same days almost every company stayed out thirty weeks and good shows were able to make a season of forty. That was the era when the best brains in the show business were devoted to selecting plays, rehearsing them, planning their advertising, and when there was no such thought as speculative profits from real estate operation.

The managers of theaters, too, made one or more important productions. For example, B.

C. Whitney, who managed theaters in Detroit, was the promoter of one or more touring companies. Eugene Tompkins, of the great Boston Theater, who later conducted Lotta Crabtree's Park Theater, Boston, also presented such big spectacles as *Burma* and *The Soudan.* The Shuberts broke into the business from Syracuse, where they ran the Bastable Theater, and A. M. Palmer was a house manager first and later a manager of productions. Augustin Daly had his first concern for Daly's Theater in New York and next for his touring organizations. These are outstanding examples. There were many of them over the country.

Al Canby, Arthur Aiston, Charles Bradley, Joseph Brooks, Frank McKee, to list a few of the hundreds, were successful individualists who did not fit in the theater when it had been organized into two great organizations. When they went they were not replaced with men of comparable abilities. The new order had no use for such talents, and young men who might have gone far in the theater were discouraged and sought other occupations.

Few of the old time press agents with their marvelous imaginations exist today. They were the men who literally made news so important that no newspaper could keep it from publication. Think of the invention that could cover busy 42nd street, New York, ankle-deep in tanbark so that the noise of the street might be deadened for the nerves of Mrs. Pat Campbell? Think of the stories of the milk baths that kept Anna Held's complexion blooming? The art is not entirely forgotten, for press agents still ply their trade, and the circus continues to be accelerated by imaginative writers. But with very few exceptions these men of newspaper brains no longer are employed by theaters or dramatic attractions.

When I was young in the theater, managers, touring with an attraction, would read plays all winter long. Every minute to be spared from other duties was devoted to finding a play for the succeeding season. The managers, too, toured with their companies. They were on the job. Absentee landlordism had not then come into the theater. The manager was a really

important person who transacted his business by telegraph with all parts of the world.

When the season was at an end, the old time manager had determined in his own mind what the next season's play was to be. He immediately engaged a company and began rehearsals early in August. All dark theaters were open to him for holding rehearsals. Plays were very well rehearsed. The lithographers were brought in to make sketches. Scene painters devised elaborate settings. Press stories were prepared and artists made illustrations.

The merchandising side was carefully studied. Catch lines and slogans were invented. Managers wrote to their many newspaper friends over the country telling of their plans. Newspapers everywhere blossomed with summer stories of what the fall would bring. The public appetite was whetted.

The high value of land on which theaters stand has made a big difference, too. It has meant forcing the regular theatrical season beyond what it normally might be. Plays have been kept alive and theaters kept open in an effort to reduce

the rental charge per week, but my own thought is that doing this has taken something from the fine flavor of the theater. The respite from attendance was a good thing for it. This condition made people keen for the new theatrical season to begin. It does not seem to me that there is, or can be, the same enthusiasm now.

In the old days the theater opened with a bang about Labor Day and kept its pace through forty weeks. An opening was an important event. First nighters were a class and numerous. Now we have openings which seemingly are kept a secret, and closings within a week. Who can know in one week if a play is really bad? Often a play does not get under way in a single week. The late Charles Hoyt worked months on his plays, writing and rewriting scenes, and of his plays it was true that they were built in rehearsals.

Frequently, too, a play opens and it seems that the press department is really a secret service. Nothing appears in print regarding it. The newspaper reviewers come to see it, and then it is either a success and remains, or is quickly

hushed and still in death. Once theatrical managers worked zealously to make a success of every production. Now they work upon the law of average. Five plays will likely include one knockout success, one fair success, one indifferent success and a couple of failures. The first two will carry the others and more.

Often we hear that the show business is precarious, yet it is odd that the same names continue to appear over theaters and as promoters of attractions. There was a time when managers, with hardluck seasons, really suffered. Some went under never to rise again. Others were staked by friends and backers and worked their way back into strong position. The theater today is more like Lloyd's, an association of English insurance brokers who take over pieces of the risk for a piece of the profit. Just so, theaters and attractions are promoted and many professionals take a small percentage.

The great Augustin Daly was often poor. His profits he put back into the theater, in wonderful objects of art, in visits abroad; and generally a revival of a play would win back his losses in

doubtful experiments. Daly even lost his theaters, but he never lost confidence in himself. The managers who followed might lose a bit in one production, or in one theater, but they never had all of their money in one promotion.

One of the hurts of the business came when it was discovered that money could be made without owning theaters, without making productions. Gathering all the theaters into a great chain and booking their time set a new day in the theater, which was beginning its great change as I was coming into theatrical life. C. B. Jefferson, Klaw and Erlanger have really built up the strong chain of theaters. They operated with Charles Frohman in New York; with Nixon and Zimmerman in Philadelphia, with Rich and Harris in Boston and even owned theaters in New Orleans.

Their hold upon the theater became strong. The time came when they controlled practically all the houses, all the companies, when all the local managers lost much of their influence and responsibility, when the individual producing manager became no more than a partner with

© by Byron

In "Higgledy-Piggledy"—Joe Weber and Anna Held in the foreground.

them in an undertaking, and more often but a salaried employee.

Klaw and Erlanger made productions to fill their theaters and the "time" they controlled, but they cared nothing for the business of producing if they could get others to do this work, and could arrange the booking. They wished themselves in for a piece of valuable properties as the price of an engagement in New York City. When Viola Allen made her great hit as Glory Quayle in *The Christian,* it was told, she was kept out of New York playing second class theaters until one-third of the profits were made over to Klaw and Erlanger.

Whether the theater has suffered in all the years since, because Klaw and Erlanger secured a strangle hold on the business, and if it would have been a better institution today if the individual managers who did so much for the theater had been permitted to continue in business, I am not prepared to say, but my own opinion is that the theater is a place of individuals and prospers from the contributions of many persons. I do not think it can be fused like a steel trust or

meat trust, because its product is not, and never can be—tonnage.

What killed the theatrical trust? To me it has always seemed that the reports of trust methods, retailed by trust actors to their friends of the outside world, was the big factor. I believe it was this common report, so long current, that made it possible for the Shuberts to gather such powerful backing. They have always been able to command backing for their plans, even when they where going into a fight that seemed to be a losing venture, or at least a great hazard.

Sam Shubert had great vision. The theater might have been a different institution in America had he lived. Lee Shubert has long been recognized as one of the keenest business men. He would have succeeded just as brilliantly in any line of endeavor. It happened that he came to the world of the theater instead of tin plate. I never felt that he was tied into the theater body and soul. Sam Shubert was, and so is J. J. Shubert. There is nothing backstage, or in the front of the house, that J. J. Shubert does not

know. He would have been an outstanding figure in the theater in any age.

The Shuberts fought the old theatrical syndicate. It was difficult for them to gather authors and actors about them. Many feared to leave the older organization. Those that did leave the so-called trust have been treated royally for their loyalty. And few who have ever been on the Shubert payroll have felt any desire to get off of it.

There may have been fundamental causes greater than personalities which wrought the changes in the theater. The rising value of real estate no doubt contributed. Theaters occupy large areas. They are nearly always in high priced locations, though since the days of common ownership of automobiles theaters do not need to be located in the very center of things. Once a theater had to be right in the heart of activities to live and prosper.

England is meeting the same changes, and certainly the English theater was never centralized in a single firm's power as it is in America. Land occupied by theaters is commonly worth

$5,000 a foot front. Laws require two side alleys. It takes 100 feet or a half million dollars in land to build a modern theater. The building itself costs as much more. To pay commercial interest and taxes a theater must earn $100,000 a year. This is about $3,000 a week for a season of thirty weeks. Once a play could remain on Broadway for $4,000 weekly business, but now this sum rarely pays the rent.

Actors, too, are better compensated than formerly. Once managers developed their own stars, or relied upon balanced companies without stars. Now, they cannot wait upon stars to be trained and developed in the art of acting. Stars are traded in, and are the subject of speculation, just as managers speculate in theaters. We often hear of a vaudeville act that commands $1,750 weekly. The actors themselves get $900 weekly and some one, or two, or three persons receive a weekly profit clip for their services. Often, too, immature and under-experienced stars are pushed forward in high places and overpaid, actors who would still have been learning their trade when I came to the theater.

The high cost of theaters, of actors, of stage hands and musicians have all made for high prices asked for admission. The prices, in turn, have made audiences hypercritical. Once, the worst that any attraction got was, "Well, it is a good entertainment." Now it dies the second night if it hasn't been a knockout success at the opening. In an effort to give the public a large money's worth, managers have crowded thirty or more scenes into a musical play, and the reaction of the public to this kaleidoscope has been just as fatal, for the audience cannot recall from so many scenes what it has actually witnessed.

The high cost of taking plays on the road, too, has had a curious effect. Once companies traveled economically. A car of scenery was transported free for twenty-five purchased tickets. This meant that all companies included twenty-five players. When this order changed and scenery was only transported at high cost, managers cut down on productions. The play with one scene, standing through three acts, was popular with managers, but one of the big assets of the theater—picture value—was lost. Audi-

ences feel they have been cheated when only one scene is shown.

Or musical shows went out with a few drapes, packed into a couple of trunks. Audiences were again disappointed. The big stars of the theater refused to leave New York, when there was so much work for them without traveling, and though they might fail in a half dozen plays in a single season, or prosper in one long engagement, they refused to travel. Then began the long era of Number 2 and Number 20 companies, often cheaply organized, poorly rehearsed, playing in impoverished stage settings. Naturally the public staid away. Where once we had six hundred theaters, all doing business, is it any wonder that we now have less than two hundred?

When I think of those wonderful productions traveling with two and three carloads of scenery, of stars who felt they had an obligation to the people of the provinces as well as to the audiences of Broadway; when I recall those splendid managers who devoted real ability to productions and in making them known to theatergoers, I feel that it is just bad thinking, poor showman-

ship, and poor merchandising which has brought the theater low, instead of the opposition of the movies with their cheap prices, as so many claim.

I might add, in passing, I never could understand the reluctance of stars to go on the road. I always fought to go. I never could understand why everybody wants to stay in New York. I know lots of people who don't have to live there. The country is roomy as can be—certainly if there's any man who has a beautiful estate, just any old place—I'm open for bids.

I have played in one New England city year after year where big business was common. The mayor of the city owned the theater and took his own tickets, not because he was too stingy to pay a door man, but because he wanted to welcome his guests. He accumulated a large fortune. Every year his theaters did well. Periodically he built new theaters as fashions changed, all earned from the profits of the business. That manager once confided to me that his profits in a single year had been as high as $54,000. That theater fell into the basket of one of the big syndicates and for the first time lost $21,000 and

has never had a successful season since, though there is no competition in the city.

The reason for such a state of things is that, when the theater was privately owned, the house treasurer could call friends on the telephone, in the quiet of an afternoon and drag $700 to $1,000 into the theater by personal solicitation. The treasurer was known to every one in the community. He knew the kind of a show that every one in town liked. He could pick a list of people who only needed to be told of the show and they bought tickets and came. Treasurers earned all the money they were paid. Now a house manager is sent from New York to manage that theater, a new one every month or so. He does not dare call many persons on the 'phone without approval from New York. It is easier to make no attempt, when the red tape of system requires fourteen O. Ks. before the fire department can be called to put out a blaze.

I know that a chain of theaters needs to be run with system and that ruin would follow if no system is provided, but I also feel that theaters may not be successfully managed in

DIDN'T I SAY GET IT!
HE HAS NEVER BEEN KNOWN TO HAVE A MISUNDERSTANDING WITH HER STAGE MANAGER
AND THE STAGE HANDS ARE MOST OBLIGING
DID YOU SAY AN INSIDE ROOM?
OH NO'M
THE HOTEL PEOPLE TOO ARE ALWAYS VERY CONSIDERATE OF HER FEELINGS
AND THEY DO SAY AS HOW SHE IS A MOST USEFUL THING TO HAVE AROUND A SHOW

It is indeed true that it "isn't so much what one says as the way one says it!"

chains. I feel that we need to get back to the old days when the theater manager and the company manager were both individualists and not mere cogs of a great machine.

When I speak of so many theaters being closed against touring attractions, I do not mean that only the smaller city play houses have closed. There are large cities in this country where only one or two attractions stray in a season. Such properties do not pay and when they can be devoted to other uses are immediately lost as first class homes of the drama.

What is the way out? Will the theater be saved for America?

Yes, the theater has survived bad management, and ridiculous exploitation. It cannot die even under the very difficult and known handicaps which it meets at present,—high cost of land, actors, stage hands, and railroad transportation. New conditions may make the task difficult, but not impossible. I am not one who waits for a return to the day when stage hands are again paid a dollar a performance, and property

men but fifty cents, while the men of the orchestra draw $2.50 a performance and the leader $5. I want all these people of the theater to be properly compensated as they would be in any other comparable work.

We will need to bring into the theater men and women capable of meeting these problems. In Cleveland a stock company with visiting stars is succeeding. In other cities stock companies made up of some few professional and auxiliary student actors from schools and colleges are providing first class entertainment. In some of the large cities, men of other affairs are coming into the theater and making small demand upon it for themselves, though I do not feel that the theater should be a place for dilletantes to play, but rather a shop for men and women to work seriously.

Nothing takes the place of the drama, and while people's time may be occupied temporarily with other things, such as the movies and the radio, there is a definite demand for the spoken play which will be satisfied and means will be

found to make the business a profitable one for those who engage in it. They should be rewarded for their dramatic efforts, and not through the speculative profits of real estate. It almost makes one have single tax thoughts.

I do feel that we need to recruit new managers, new actors. The strength of any business comes from apprentices and we are not apprenticing enough new and good brains to the theater. We need to return to an understanding and appreciation of picture value in the theater, for forty per cent or more of the value of stage entertainment is picture value.

All these things will come—are coming. The theater is going to be a better and better institution. It has broken down all of its old foolish traditions about lack of morals. No one is ashamed to be an actor today. No one is ashamed to be a theatrical manager. That is something. The theater is born new every year, and though many of the good things of the past seem to have been lost, the fact that they existed means that they will come back to us. The thing

to do is to build more and better theaters, for when a theater is put up and some one has the responsibility of making it pay its way, a policy will be found to bring about success.

The stage isn't bad now and it never has been. It is going to be better for every one concerned in it. I know a lot of very honorable and big fortunes that have been made in the theater and more of them will be. Once I hoped that I, too, might make a fortune that I could keep, but what is a fortune except an opportunity to dispense it.

Many in my profession have married fortunes, others have been indirectly connected with them. Still others, famous in their day, have disappeared and left the world to wonder what ever became of them. In some cases they are accounted dead when, to everyone's astonishment, years after they burst into type with all sorts of unexpected denouements. The famous Cherry Sisters, for example, instead of being historical myths, were recently reported in the papers as two sedate spinsters running a hundred per cent

pure dairy farm. Every now and then the idol of a past generation is found old and destitute in a garret. Happiness robs the stage of some of its brightest stars. Fay Templeton is one of these. Her marvelous talent has been lost through an ideally happy marriage and it is probable the footlights will never see her again, though we need her. A whole volume could be written about the meteoric careers that sink into oblivion, but it is all part of the passing show.

Nobody enjoys a good show, by the way, more than I do. Indeed, I doubt if anyone is more appreciative of good acting, whether or not it is in my own particular vein. Like many others I derived great pleasure from the old Boston Opera Company, composed of Henry Clay Barnaby, Eugene Coles, McDonald, Marcia Van Dresser (who, by the way, changed her name from Marie to Marcia because we were always being confused), Jessie Bartlett Davis and others. The great strength of this company lay in its balance. All the members pulled together—an art in itself which the present day theatrical com-

panies do not know. It was Jessie Bartlett Davis, by the way, who once said to me, "You are going to be heard from."

To which I responded, "Well, I'll have to murder somebody."

I believe my conscience is clear of ever murdering music. I am too fond of it. I like classical music, but I do not care for it too heavy. I play the piano to amuse myself, but not as I should had my father been more patient with me.

Music is the greatest aid in the world toward dispelling Clyptic Scissors. "What d'you mean by Clyptic Scissors?" my friends demand when I charge them with suffering from this terrible malady. It is obvious that such a phrase cannot be explained and retain its flavor, but when acquaintances are suffering from it, the name will come to mind instantly and nothing else will describe it—so there you are. A slight attack of this malady may be passed over lightly by first saying to oneself as I do, "All the little tin soldiers aren't marching in step up in the garret," or, even, "There 're a few buttons missing."

When I get in this state myself I dash to the nearest piano and things get back to normal.

I've tried a little of everything—love, life, the stage, and now after being behind the footlights all these years, I am closing the book of the past and starting again. There is no such thing as age. When we are young we have the strength to run around in enthusiastic circles, but with the advance of the years, speed decreases. As a compensation we achieve facility and experience, and, ah, that is very helpful! Though we may no longer be able to do one hundred yards in ten seconds, we do know the short cuts and they reconcile one with the approach of years.

Lack of money means nothing, for one is only broke when health is gone and, if one lives rightly and thinks rightly, the loss of health is impossible. One may be old at sixteen or young at eighty. As for me, I have the blood of explorers in me and am out to conquer new worlds. I have no sense of having ended my career, but rather of having begun it. I am starting out with a smile just as in the days when I left home with that

cross between a dog house and tool chest. I do not like a fight, but if one comes, I shall give it a hug and a kiss. I am not afraid, for fear means death, and I know that the reaching out, giving out part of me—the part that likes to make people laugh and cry and be happy—can never die.

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